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KATHIE BRANDE ;

A FIRESIDE HISTORY OF A QUIET LIFE.

VOL. I.

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A

Fireside History of a Quiet Life.

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IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON:

SMITH, ELDER & CO., 65, CORNHILL.

1856.

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KATHIE BRANDE.

A FIRESIDE HISTORY OF A QUIET LIFE.

"Say to all manner of happiness, 'I can do without thee.'
With self-renunciation Life begins."—" *Sartor Resartus*."

CARLYLE.

I.

FAR up amidst the breezy north-western hills there rises a little stream—noisy, brawling, insignificant. Through the long summer day it eddies with sparkling music amongst cumbering stones; faint odorous wild-flowers cluster in mossy nooks above its source, and broad green branches stretch athwart it to make rippling shadows in its sunshine. Here, the only arch that spans it is the rainbow in the spray; the only breath that curls its tiny waves is the wind that toys amongst

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the balmy heather and golden gorse. In winter it comes down in a tearing flood, all foam and fury; in white haste it leaps from fall to fall, as if it longed to escape from the holy solitudes to the haunts of men. Now it swirls through a broad mill-wheel, making a mere plaything of it in its fresh and earnest strength; anon it dashes by a village, pours over worn stepping-stones, darts under the black arch of a bridge, and so away for many pleasant winding miles, until, weary with its over haste, it creeps sluggishly between the darkling houses into the old cathedral city.

II.

There is a dim, almost forgotten, legend which dates the rise of Eversley from the days when there were kings in Israel: we, however, will not grope so deeply into the glimmer of mythological and historical crypts, but will look on the present surface of things, glancing back only at

those chronicles of change and time which are embalmed in still-existing monuments.

The city proper is enclosed by walls, around which the fierce roar of battle and siege has echoed again and again. On the great south road, centuries ago, from ten miles away, came sweeping the bloody torrent of the fight up to the very gate of the town. Ghastly skeleton heads grinned in the face of the Sabbath upon the flying and pursuing hosts, till tumbled down from their spiked eminence on the battlemented bar to make way for their last year's victors. Over the Mount from Marston, after their fatal defeat, came the broken Royalists to shelter within the city. Tradition tells of the hurry and confusion at the gate as they pressed in on that glorious summer evening:—hot, shamed, furious, beaten men, whose arms God had withheld from conquering in a weak, lost cause.

At this day, looking outward from the walls, stretch the growing suburbs, meadows, pastures, corn-fields, gentle slopes crested with wood, quiet reaches in the river, and pleasant villages: only

in a name here and there which the legendary voice of the people has preserved, are any traces left of chivalrous or warlike times. But the mellow and romantic tints of old days cling fast to the city within; conspicuous from every point rise the mist-grey cathedral towers; for seven hundred years or more have they flung their holy shadow down upon the clustered houses below, whence generation after generation has crumbled into ignoble dust, while the monument of their sin or their repentance still lifts a sacred grandeur up to heaven. What religious master-mind conceived its glories, what architect planned, what skilful workman wrought on foliated capital, on stately column, on airy arch, tradition saith not; there the Minster stands, the pride, the grace, the glory of the ancient city. Hands never cease from it, or Time's remorseless decay either. With imperceptible touch he wears the sharp edge of solid buttress, dulls the point of arrowy pinnacle, gnaws the mortar out between the stones, and shakes the stained window in its granite frame. Then swift comes the cunning mason, and repairs

his brother's work, done centuries before, while the arch-destroyer creeps away to another aisle, and goes on with his silent labour in the shade.

Resting there, you may conjure back the chronicled times when kings kept their Christmas in Eversley, and came to worship with a train of mitred bishops, stoled priests, and gaudy courtiers : when faint aromatic incense odours, mingling with chanted prayers, floated upwards to the dark galleries whence cowed monks, in mortification and bitterness of spirit, watched the worldly pomps and vanities disporting themselves gaily in God's house. You may imagine the grim Puritan entering with a stamp of his iron heel and a clang of his ready sword—railing in his heart at what men as good as he have offered to their Master and his. This puller-down of old institutions, this scoffer against ancient superstitions—himself more bigoted and superstitious than any that have gone before him—scowls around at the beauty his dull soul cannot feel. He would give to God of that which costs him nothing; verily he would take the consecrated

vessels from the altar, melt them down with a pharisaical incantation, stamp them with a die, and put them as coin into his purse.

Over the pavement what millions of now shadowless footsteps have passed ! What hosts of defunct garments have trailed across the reflected radiance cast down out of heaven through the gemmed windows ! The dim aisles are all haunted with the Past. Unseen crowds of spirits file in and out at the doors ; the voices of choristers dead and gone mingle with to-day's anthem high up in the echoing roof ; the long, thundrous roll of forgotten music swells and dies along the choir ; ghostly sermons are preached by ghostly divines to ghostly auditors ; strange, uncertain shapes glide to and fro in the dusk ; from pillar to pillar, from tomb to tomb, from gallery to gallery, all noiseless and trackless as the night—priest and penitent, prince and pauper, the saint canonized spite of his misdeeds, and the sinner absolved of his sin ; a midnight gathering of an innumerable phantom host, the spiritual essences of the generations who have lived and

died in the city. The quaint corbel-heads that finish the drip-stones above the doorways and arches, seem to grin in the half-gloom, to turn their stony eyeballs, to move their lips, and to shake their twisted locks as if stirred with galvanic life. What odd faces they must have been that suggested these crumbling masks ! Yet even now, amongst the figures that people the streets, you may encounter antique mummified visages, which, if struck into stone, might peer appropriately from a niche or garnish a corbel.

These things are not revealed to the bodily eye of every observer. Unimaginative thousands view the Cathedral only from an architectural point of view ; they set their watches by the clock over the great south door ; they are aware that two daily services are gone through by a staff of eminently respectable clergy, supported by a posse of little boys with high spirits, shiny faces, and crimped frills, guarded by a few men with silver pokers. You might talk to them for an hour without exciting a spark of enthusiasm : they are used to it ; they have seen it all their

lives ; it is a storehouse for centuries of damp ; the bells are fine—yes, the bells are beautiful, and that is all they will allow.

We will not explore these haunted precincts with them, but rather go abroad into the rough, practical streets. In this neighbourhood the houses are mostly ancient ; narrow lanes, with projecting upper-stories, branch off from the Minster-yard into Friargate ; low, arched gateways, with rooms above them, lead out of these lanes into courts built round with timber houses, the huge cross-beams of which, struck over with coarse plaster and rudely coloured, are still sound and strong enough to stand as many centuries longer as they have already stood. Through their ruinous, yawning doorways you may descry dilapidated oaken staircases, deeply fretted with the tooth of time, wanting here a part of the hand-rail, and there half a score of clumsy balustrades ; lancet-windows, set in whitewashed walls, show fragmentary scraps of armorial bearings amongst their foul and broken panes ; and in the wretched chambers where exist many poor families

—journeyman tailors, shoemakers, bird-fanciers, and the like—relics of former splendours still cling to the walls in the shape of carved panels, elaborate mantel-pieces, and defaced gilding. Groups of playing children herd together on the open stairways where court gallants and gay ladies once went up and down, rustling in silk and velvet; whilst knots of picturesque tramps take up their rest under the arches: though it is to be feared that the power of charity has departed thence for ever. There is generally a little colony of singing-birds in these courts: you may see the cages hanging on hooks beside the windows, and even on the wall below the sill, where the prisoner and the sunshine can have a talk together; and flowers, too—not dank and mildewed, but as full of scent and bloom as if they lived on country air—flourish profusely in these homes: *desolate* homes, I was going to say, but I think the birds and flowers are signs of better things, and that where they grow so beautifully rich human affections must grow too.

Picturesque to the very desire of the artist's eye

are these courts and streets. When the sun is going down beyond Westgate it strikes the high-peaked gables with a red hue: it warms the cold yellow and black of the walls; flickers on the lattice-paned windows, and touches every prominence into broad effect. These are scenes for moonlight too: the shadows lurk so thick and mysterious in the doorways, with the chill, white shimmer creeping to the steps, yet not daring to break the secrets of the gloom, that you almost look to see some fearsome shape glide out and pass you like a blast of freezing wind.

There is a fascination about these hoary relics of a past age that does not belong to the busier streets; for though, here and there, a gabled house is left, jammed in between modern fabrics as if improvement had forgotten it, the character of the place is lost. The inns have held their ground, and preserved their distinctive features best. There is an ancient hostelrie in the corn market, by the sign of the Cross Keys, which hangs three stories, one beyond the other, over the pavement; its roof rises into high peaks, with

clusters of spiral chimneys at each angle, and wide leaded windows in each room. Its front is of beams painted black and white, and round the yard is a covered wooden gallery, upon which the chamber doors open. There is a very old elm in this yard, which tradition says was planted in Queen Mary's time by a mad pervert, who, having renounced his faith to save his body, was afterwards so troubled in his conscience that his wits forsook him; which was by many esteemed a meet judgment for his sin. They still show the place where he chose to live, believing himself in hiding there and safe from pursuit: it is a black, sunless den, which looks as if the maniac's remorse hung about it yet. There are other inns of this type also: the George, in High Street, the Red Lion, in Friargate, and the Fleece, in the Barbican; all of which are houses of good repute, and redolent with reminiscences of generations of travellers.

The churches within the walls are many in number. Standing near the south gate, and looking inwards over the city, you see the low,

square towers, the airy, graceful lanterns, and the slender spires rising above the closely-built houses, all grey with age, and quietly suggestive of buried piety. These edifices stand chiefly at street corners, many of them with graveyards attached, where the mounds, covered with rank grass, rise high above the level of the flags. There is no feeling of rest connected with these last homes, lying as they do in the midst of life-traffic; yet I can imagine some, wishful to think that they have not quite done with the stir and the turmoil, the loves and hopes of existence, preferring to moulder where old acquaintance may give their tombstone a thought and a glance in passing by, rather than in a still country nook, where the sun, and winds, and rains of heaven can alone light upon them for evermore.

The river takes a direct course through the midst of the city. Looking up the stream, the houses have the air of a foreign town; above the bridge many are built close to the water's edge, and are of the same quaint architecture as those in the vicinity of the Minster; below it are

staithes, on which abut numerous low alleys; there are always vessels loading and unloading, and small craft going up and down; for, some fifty miles away, this moor-born river becomes a great estuary, where whole fleets ride, and by which sits one of the principal eastern trading ports. If you were to walk along the staithe on the left bank you would presently come to an open space and a beautiful planted walk, a short turn from which brings you up into Castle-street. Before you rises a massy, frowning edifice, the county prison: the debtors' side is only defended by lofty iron palisades enclosing a garden; this part is opposite to the open field, and here thousands of excited rabble, from far and near, collect periodically to witness solemn, judicial tragedies, enacted on a platform below a narrow black door in the wall. The lesson is very old in Eversley, and not profitable; indeed, some intellects there are so obtuse, that they persist in remaining stone-blind to the moral of it, and in wishing that it might not be forced upon them any longer.

A little higher up this street are the Castle Mills and the Castle Bridge, which last spans a foul, sluggish stream, called the Ness; this dyke winds below the outer wall of the prison, and passing under an old bridge in the Barbican, forms a pestiferous swamp, which is always going to be drained, but never gets begun. At one side of the Barbican bridge is the Fleece Inn; going down this street towards the bar, it is mean and dirty, infested by beggars and other such gentry; but in the opposite direction are good shops, up to where it joins the market-place. In a line with the Barbican—a devious line certainly—are Wheelgate, Finkle Street, and Westgate, which brings us back to the Minster neighbourhood, and the heart of the ancient city.

If I have described the Cathedral Town with a too tedious minuteness, my love for it must be pleaded in excuse. Moreover it forms the background of this Family History.

III.

In one of the courts before described—Percie Court it was called—I was born on Christmas Eve. The clanging joy-bells of the old Minster close by drowned the feeble wail with which I announced my existence, and gave me a boisterous welcome into life. Nobody could have been more gladly received than I at that festive season, for I had no predecessors in my parents' house, though they had been five years married. I have been told since that I was a puling fretful bit of a child at first, and no doubt this was true; for all the recollections I have of my early youth are cloudy with suffering and tears.

My father was a minor canon and curate of St. Mark's, the old church outside of Friargate. His income was very moderate, and as I proved to be the forerunner of a numerous progeny his life became a struggle: for, in those dear times, with six little bodies to clothe and six little mouths to

fill, it was often very difficult to make both ends meet decently. A season of sickness which removed two of my brothers was a heavy pull on our resources; indeed, we never seemed to recover from it afterwards. Up to fifteen my life knew neither change nor excitement, and but few pleasures, except to hear my mother say, "Kathie, you are a comfort to me."

My father was a reserved, studious, silent man; he took but little notice of us as children, and we stood in great awe of him. I can yet remember the sound of my mother's warning "Hush!" when his foot was heard on the stairs, which made us all as mute as mice. Yet he was not unkind; his voice was never raised in anger; and it is a mystery to me still why we crept into corners and away out of his presence as we did. He taught me my lessons daily and was very patient, but I was always glad when the task was done—perhaps because he felt it irksome, and showed that he felt it. He was a tall man, with a slight stoop in his shoulders and a negligent slouching gait, with a nervous restlessness of movement that had become

habitual to him. In one of the parlour-windows he had a writing-table where he sat at night with his books and manuscripts; then if we spoke at all it was in the smallest whisper, and when we moved it was on cautious tip-toe, with my mother's anxious eye following us. We imagined him to be writing some learned and ponderous history, and regarded his labour with deep reverence. He was busy with it at every moment of leisure, on the Sabbath as well as on the week-days, and always until far on into the night. It was the Moloch to which he immolated time, health, natural affections, everything. It had eaten up his heart, youth, spirits, and conscience. He was happy: at least I suppose he was, for his work was life and love to him, and he did not appear to have a thought beyond it; his professional duties he performed exactly and mechanically, his social duties not at all, or scarcely at all. I have watched him, sometimes by the hour together, pondering in my secret mind what this all-absorbing work might be, and yearning to lift were it but a corner of the veil behind which he lived his true life. His

large pallid brow, streaked with shadowy grey hair, was the brow of a sage, but the eyes below it were lustrous, womanish, and of a wonderful beauty. I craved to know and love him better than I did, and wrought many a secret plan for winning a way into his heart; but the habitual awe in which we had been brought up prevailed, and that blissful time never came.

One night—the snow lay deep all round the Minster, and Christmas storms were abroad—there came a messenger out of Friargate to fetch my father to administer spiritual consolation to a man at the point of death. He left his work reluctantly. I can see him yet hovering about the table, fingering the manuscript, and hastily dashing down some happy thought lest it should escape him ere his return. My mother had to remind him that the necessity was immediate, he delayed so long. After an absence of more than two hours he returned, wet and tired; but he sat down to his papers at once and began to write: in a few minutes, however, he rose and approached the fire.

“Mary” (my mother’s name was Mary), “I shall never work any more,” he said in a strange voice.

She was frightened and asked what he meant, but he would give her no explanation: perhaps he could not.

His words were prophetic. He had been breathing a fever-poisoned atmosphere, and the taint of the disease was already burning in his veins. He relinquished hope from the first. In his wanderings he talked much of his great work, but of his wife and children never. He liked to have a pen in his hand, with which he drew mystical figures in the air; then his countenance was full of peace.

A short time before his death, sense returned, and with sense an expression of pain and mental care. “It is a mere splendid fragment,” he said, faintly; “a torso without head or limbs. I thought to have hewn out a grand statue that should endure, but my fingers will never guide stroke more.”

We understood him to speak of his great work.

“No one can profit by my life’s labour : burn it, Mary ; burn it.”

He turned his face wearily to the wall, while my mother wept and held his hand.

Soon after, he took leave of us all ; and while he was kissing little Jean, there came over his face a flashing as of light, followed quickly by the pale shadow of angels’ wings. And we stole out of his awful dead presence with trembling and tears.

He lies buried in St. Mark’s churchyard, close under the low wall which parts it from the street. Passing by it, the stranger may see the tall rank grass waving in the wind where it grows upon his grave.

IV.

Sorrow, which is never to seek, had come upon us heavily. With my father we lost, of course, our main support ; indeed, but for an annuity of fifty pounds which my mother possessed, we

should have been destitute. I imbibed a warm admiration for her independence and firmness of character at this juncture. She was resolved to maintain us by the labour of her own hands rather than to scatter us abroad amongst our well-to-do kinsfolks, to eat the bitter bread of charity. Her plans were speedily formed, and put into execution without delay. We remained in Percie Court, because the rent was low ; but our two servants were discharged, and we got in their place a girl from the Grey School, named Ann Farrer, of whose youthful eccentricities and incapacity I retain a lively remembrance to this day.

My brother Stephen was on the foundation of the endowed grammar-school, so that his education was in a manner provided for. He was a very handsome boy, dark-complexioned, with rich, curling hair, bright eyes, and a tall, straight figure ; but in character he was indolent, fickle, and without perseverance. He was my mother's favourite : she had set her heart on his entering the Church, because his father and grandfather

had been clergymen ; but the boy himself had no vocation for it : so, whilst she pinched, toiled, economized, and saved, to lay by sufficient to defray his college expenses, he studied or idled as suited his inclination of the moment. Many a long evening hour which ought to have been consecrated to Latin theme and Greek exercise was spent by him with the ringers up in the bell-tower of the Minster ; but my mother always consoled herself in the idea that his great abilities would enable him to make up all arrears of study when he should awake to the necessity of it.

Of my two sisters, Isabel was too delicate and Jean too young to stand in need of anything but home care and home tuition for some time to come ; and while my mother by various kinds of needlework eked out for us a slender subsistence, I initiated Isabel in the mysteries of pot-hooks and hemming, coaxed little Jean through the alphabet, helped Stephen with his lessons and numerous impositions, made or mended the family linen, superintended the proceedings of Ann in the kitchen, and remonstrated with her gravely

when her vagaries overpassed the bounds of reason.

Isabel had more of my father in her face than any of us, but hers was a peculiar and wilful temper. There were moments when nobody could control her ; fits of passionate, brooding sullenness, when one might have imagined her possessed with an evil spirit. At other seasons she overflowed with uncontrollable spirits, which, however, usually took a mischievous turn before they effervesced into stillness. Ann used to say to her then, " Oh, but you are the very mother of mischief, Isabel !" and the epithet was not inappropriate. Jean was the patient, little loving slave to her caprices, always eager to ward off from her annoyance and offence, just as my mother had been with my father. Isabel had in everything her own way ; my mother feared to struggle with her peculiar character, lest it should be heated to revolt or hardened into obstinacy. I waited on her and submitted to her mechanically, because it seemed to be my place in the household to serve, work, and obey. She had, however, in

the core of her heart smouldering fires of love, which broke forth now and then like volcano-flame. She would have worn one to death with sacrifice and exaction, and then slain herself for very sorrow and remorse.

Jean and I took after our mother both in person and in disposition.

V.

I look back upon my ancient and gloomy birthplace with a love which those whose lot has fallen in brighter places will scarcely understand. Percie Court lay quite under the shadow of the Minster, and was always hushed, and always darkling. The house had not then been divided into separate tenements, and was esteemed a most respectable dwelling, though the upper chambers were disused because the floors were broken and unsafe, and the huge rafters showed the bare tiling of the steep roof between their massive bulk. From the court we entered a stone hall,

quite naked and empty, smelling of damp and church vaults, always full of draughts, and colonized by spiders: thence a spring-door, covered with discoloured red cloth, led into the habitable part of the house. On a bright summer evening, passing through the red door was like leaving a charnel-house for a church aisle. There was a window of curious rich stained glass sunk into a recess of the staircase opposite, through which the setting sun cast the glow of ruby, sapphire, and topaz on the dusky oaken balustrades, the panelled walls, and shallow, hollow steps: at all other times they looked blank and cold as the hall; only at sundown were they quaintly tapestried with more brilliant dyes than loom of mortal fashioning can weave.

As a child I loved this window dearly: it was my favourite retreat; and crouched in its seclusion I spent most of the few idle and happy hours that fell to my lot. Thither I carried my books to read undisturbed by the little ones, or, perhaps, sometimes to escape my seam. A curious collection those books were on which my mental cravings

were fed : there was an old edition of Shakspeare's Plays, with quaint engravings, which delighted me amazingly. I shuddered at Shylock's tenacious holding to the letter of his bond, but I had a sort of pained sympathy with him too, as the one strong resentful soul amongst an oppressed and hated race. "Hath not a Jew eyes? Hath not a Jew hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions? fed with the same food, hurt with the same weapons, subject to the same diseases, healed by the same means, warmed and cooled by the same winter and summer as a Christian is?" There was the burning passionate thrill of deadly hate in it, which stirred me as intense and eloquent feeling, good or evil, ever does stir some hearts. Hamlet's philosophy puzzled me, though the sound of it wakened up my keenest thoughts: was he mad, or selfish, or what? The riddle is not solved to this day. Then with the weird witches in "Macbeth," and the rising procession of phantoms, I shivered in nerve-creeping horror; but the crowning joy of all, even though it made me wake in the night,

chill with starting fears, was Clarence's dream.
That—

“O Lord! methought, what pain it was to drown!
What dreadful noise of water in my ears!
What sights of ugly death within mine eyes!
Methought, I saw a thousand fearful wrecks;
A thousand men that fishes gnawed upon;
Wedges of gold, great anchors, heaps of pearl,
Inestimable stones, unvalued jewels,
All scattered in the bottom of the sea.
Some lay in dead men's skulls; and, in those holes
Where eyes did once inhabit, there were crept
(As 't were in scorn of eyes) reflecting gems,
That wooed the slimy bottom of the deep
And mocked the dead bones that lay scattered by.”

That was a vivid picture to me; I could, when I pressed my hand upon my eyes, see those white relics and gems strewn amongst the weeds beneath the sea; “the envious flood” which still kept prisoner the panting dreamer's soul; the blue and livid corpses prone upon the slimy sand. It haunted my sleep for months, as afterwards did an awful story of a murder that Ann related with all its minute details, and probably a large amount of vulgar exaggeration.

In quieter mood I found the "Spectator" pleasant company; I had a firm belief that all the Amintas, Chloes, and Sylvias, were real women, and entertained a presumptuous suspicion that many of them were very silly ones, and must have been trying to the short-faced gentleman's patience. There was "Rasselas," also, which I liked better then than I do now, and the "Vicar of Wakefield" (a real person because Wakefield was down on the map), and that queer Chinese who was a "Citizen of the World," and "Junius's Letters" (it is a marvel to me what amusement I contrived to discover in them), and a few other old books; but nothing, nothing new. I was often in a profound state of mystification over these desultory private readings, but I rarely sought help in my difficulties lest my liberty should be curtailed; I blundered on till the light came to me, and if it never came I bided contentedly in the dark.

"Kathie, you will read yourself blind," my mother used sometimes to say; but her authority asserted itself no further, and I was left to my

own devices: at least, until my father's death. Subsequent to that event my idle times were very few, and very far between. This is why that ancient painted window glows like a gem unique in my memory: no after-readings have had half the pith or charm that lurked in the stolen hours spent in its gusty seclusion.

To the right of the red door opened the kitchen; to the left a mouldy-smelling flight of brick steps led down into a mysterious region into whose depths I never penetrated, but which my imagination peopled with many terrors both of a bodily and spiritual nature: such as the restless tenants of a neighbouring churchyard; bones lying white on the earthen floor; rats crouching amongst them, with bright eyes, and crawling things running up slimy walls.

Our parlour opened from the first landing: it had a western aspect, and though it was a large low-ceiled room with wainscoted walls, black with age, and antique furniture to match, it had a homely pleasantness to all of us. There were three long narrow windows, curtained with faded

folds of crimson cloth, which had been rich and sightly once upon a time, though that day was past; a circular mirror, cracked across and with a tarnished gilt frame, whose reflections were an antidote to personal vanity, was secured against the wainscot between two of these windows. The mantel-piece was lofty, and curiously carved in foliage and angels' heads; it sustained as ornaments several Chinese figures, grotesquely ugly, and all more or less mutilated, which my brother Stephen impiously styled our household gods. In a recess by the fireplace stood my father's empty chair, and near it the writing-table he had always used: at the upper end of the room was his book-case, piled to the ceiling with dusky lugubrious volumes, which presently grew grey with dust and lack of use.

The centre window opened upon a brick-work terrace, from which, by a flight of broken steps, we could descend into a narrow strip of ground, which we dignified with the name of garden; though it had neither greenness nor beauty. A few pined shrubs and scentless flowers held a

precarious existence in the sapless mould, but the walls on either side were so lofty as quite to exclude the genial sunshine, so that the little struggling blossoms died unblown. My mother had a custom of going out there on the Sunday evenings in summer time; she used to pace gently backwards and forwards, meditating gravely, and sometimes murmuring to herself verses of our hymns. I do not think her temper was silent or reserved by nature, but it had grown so by habit; she was scarcely less contemplative and quiet than my father had been.

I had a little chamber to myself, with one latticed window which looked full on the grand old Minster. I could lie in my bed and watch the sun stealing down from pinnacle to pinnacle with silent steps, circling the bell-tower with a halo, while the streets still lay in the grey of the morning; or the moonlight making black shadows in doorways and empty niches; or the snow lying white on ledge, and buttress, and roof. Solemn always, majestic always; but most about Christmas time, when the waits

roamed about the streets on bitter nights, and woke me out of my sleep with loud sung carols, and I sat up to listen with dreamy eyes on the Minster towers, through which the north-east wind whistled a noisy chorus.

But it is enough of this: let me remember that my home, full of voices as it may be to me, is to others but a dumb picture.

VI.

It is a life-history, not a romance, that I have undertaken to tell; therefore, if any look for wild adventure or marvellous experience let them close this book, for they will find in it only disappointment. To those whose lines have fallen to them in quiet lowly places, who endure rather than struggle, who patiently take their daily labour as it is laid out for them, inch by inch, and piece by piece, my story may go home like an echo of their own pale lives; possibly to encourage,

to strengthen, and to console: for other than these it can have but small interest

I can make no appeal to the sympathies of those who go clad in purple and fine linen, and fare sumptuously every day; save in those two things which the great human heart has in common—love and death. And even there we should be at variance; for life is a more earnest matter with the workers than the pleasure-seekers, and both love and death meet *us* with less pomp and circumstance than *them*.

But in the ingle nook I may be welcome; for I have had my silent sacrifices, my pinching economies, and times when existence seemed held on a hard feudal tenure of perpetual service, which made the grave look like a door of escape from the house of bondage. A few glimpses through this ever-opening portal have I had into the valley beyond; but when I would fain have pressed forward to gain those plains of rest, there was always a hand to put me back, and a voice that bade me bide my time. Hours of crying when there was none to hear, heavy rains of

affliction, and "clouds returning after the rain," have not failed me; yet have I had my wanderings by still waters, and my rainbowed skies like others: a life of true April sheen, mingled sun and showers.

I am, let me premise, no heroine: I never did or conceived a deed trenching on the heroic. My path has lain before me without choice; nothing short of wings could have borne me out of it: whether it has been rough or smooth, flower-decked or overgrown with stinging-nettles, it is for others to judge. I am come now to the grey November of my year, and as it lies mapped out before my dim eyes, there are spots with the sun on them, and, near by, dense shadows under rocks and trees, which make their glow the tenderer; and there is a sound of rippling water, now faint, now ringing clear, now overpowered by other voices, which I take to be the ever-living fount of hope in the heart, growing broad, full, and free in these latter days, as I and it glide outwards together towards the eternal sea.

VII.

Sitting one night at my work, an idea flashed into my mind. Stephen was gone to the bells, and the little ones were in bed, so my mother and I were alone. My fingers ached over the long stiff seam with which they had been busy for an hour; I stretched them, yawned, and gave several unequivocal signs of being thoroughly tired. My mother was knitting some fancy work socks, and her needles kept up their monotonous click, click, though her eyes were raised. They again reverted to her work, when they had taken in what I am afraid they often saw at this period, namely, an unhappy discontented face.

Suddenly I spoke. "Mother," said I, "where did you live when you were a girl?"

I have not yet described my mother: you shall have her portrait as she looked then, sitting in her high-backed chair, with an expression of surprise in her large uplifted eyes at the oddity

of the question—a question none of her children had ever asked before ; for, though kind and gentle, she was always very reserved with us.

Imagine a figure rather below the middle size, straight as a dart and thin, clad in a well-saved dress of black stuff, an apron of white muslin, and a folded neckerchief of the same spotless material crossed on her bosom, and fastened at the throat with a jet brooch. Imagine a face of grave expression, small featured, and pale, with eyes of a peculiarly clear and brilliant brown ; brows finely arched, but losing their darkness ; and grey hair carefully smoothed from a high forehead under her widow's cap. She was forty-six years old at this time, but, notwithstanding her alertness of manner, she looked much older from her exceeding gravity.

My question was unexpected, and my mother and I gazed at each other for a moment or two in silence ; then she smiled—her smile was as pleasant as it was rare—and said, “ In quite a country place : in a little moorland village, where the church was like a barn, overgrown with moss

and ivy, and the parsonage was a white-washed cottage. There were a few slated hovels in a hollow below, and no other house within three miles of ours."

"Oh, mother! how lonely it must have been!"

"Not so, Kathie; I loved it dearly, and my heart yearns to it yet. It seemed to me as if I could scarcely breathe when your father brought me down into this low country. I pined a long while for the sharp air of the fells and the briny scent of the heather. I feared almost that I should die, cramped up in this place; but the homesickness wore off at last. Still I should like to see those bleak Cumberland hills once more before I die."

There were tears in my mother's eyes as she spoke: my random questions had opened out far-away vistas in her memory; so I gathered up my work and stitched diligently on, letting her meditate in peace. She was the first to break the silence. "When I remember it all it makes me feel foolish, Kathie," said she; "but it was so beautiful! Upon the hills beyond the church

I have wandered many a summer day : all around was deep solitude and infinite calm ; billowy steep beyond steep, with lurking glimpses of the mountain tarns nested amongst them. Far away in the purple west stretched the sea. Oh, Kathie ! words are not colours, or my love could paint you a fair picture of those bonnie dales, with the grey torn veils of cloud wreathing the fells in twilight. I think any poverty would have been more endurable than the pang of leaving home."

"How was it mother ; tell me ?"

"I married some years before my father's death, but I never left him, for he was an old man, and in failing health even then. But the solitude fretted your father, for he was not moorland-bred, like me, and had no love for the sights and sounds of nature ; and when death released my remaining parent, we left Cumberland at once. For six months we were at Whitecliffe, a beautiful sea-coast town, where I could have been very happy and contented ; but my husband was made Minor Canon of Eversley, and as it

was necessary that he should live here, he exchanged his country living for the perpetual curacy of St. Mark's; and having the command of good libraries and such society as was most congenial to him, he never showed any disposition to move again."

"Have you any brothers or sisters living, mother?"

"No, Kathie, I was an only child; but you have relatives on your father's side. There is your Aunt Aurelia, Mrs. Marston, who is a widow, and your grandmother Brande, who is still living at Crofton, where your father was born."

"Have you ever been there, mother?"

"Never, child; neither have I ever seen any of your father's friends. There was some difference between him and his mother, that was never fully explained to me."

"Poor papa! do you think he was in the wrong?"

"Oh no, Kathie! He was kindness and goodness itself. Mrs. Brande was a proud, austere woman, I have heard; quite unlike her son."

The sharp click of the knitting - needles went on, and I toiled at the interminable seam until the Minster clock struck nine, when my mother bade me go and see that Ann had Stephen's supper ready, for as he had not been in to tea he would be ravenously hungry. Glad to be released on any service, I folded up my work, and went down to the kitchen. Ann was sitting with her feet on the fender, darning her black worsted stockings by the light of an unsnuffed candle, which just served to make darkness visible in the great kitchen. She sprang up as I opened the door, and ran towards me, staring and half affrighted. I could not help laughing at her odd, bewildered air.

"Indeed, Miss Kathie, but you gave me a turn!" cried she, breathless; "this old house is so lonesome: out and out worse than the Grey School."

"And that was bad enough, Ann, I dare say. It is lonesome; I have thought so myself often."

"Especially since the master died, Miss Kathie.

If it was not for the cricket that lives down by the boiler I would be regularly moped some nights. I wonder how them creatures can bide the heat; will you tell me, Miss?"

"I do not know myself, Ann; but I have read that there are things which live *in* the fire: they are called salamanders."

"Indeed, Miss, and what may they be like? are they boggles, or spirits, or what?"

"They are salamanders, Ann: that is all I know. There are none in this country, I believe."

"You are not meaning the picters in the fire, miss, that one sees when one looks in amongst the coals? I see a many some nights. 'Deed, but this is a haunted old house; though your mother does say there is nothing to be met in it worse than ourselves." Ann sighed and waved her head dolorously: at fifteen a quiet life is insufferable.

Having delivered my order and seen it executed, I was returning slowly to the parlour, shading the flickering flame of the candle with my hand, when the loud clash of the outer door, and a rush of cold air which almost extinguished the

light, warned me of Stephen's tardy return. He came through the red door whistling cheerily ; and when he espied me standing at the top of the stairs, he cried out in his usual mode of addressing me, " Kathie, is that you—Kathie the moody—Kathie the mournful ? "

At the sound of her darling's voice, my mother issued from the parlour.

" Stephen, my boy," she said, looking down over the banisters, " leave your coat in the kitchen, and pull off your boots. Kathie will get your slippers. Are you wet ? "

" Wet, my revered mother ! " echoed Stephen, laughing : " how can anybody be wet with walking twenty yards on a starlight night in as hard a frost as February is in the habit of treating us to."

This was quite true ; but our dear mother was always so anxious.

We entered the parlour together, and soon Stephen appeared, carrying a candle to light Ann up-stairs with his supper-tray ; he was teasing her all the time, and contrived finally to puff out the

light as she took it from him to leave the room. We heard her groping her way down-stairs, and we heard also a clattering fall and smothered shriek as she got to the bottom. Stephen laughed mischievously, and shook his curly head ; while my mother looked a very mild reproof, and bade him eat his supper, which he instantly applied himself to doing with a most vigorous and healthy appetite. Having finished, he pulled up his chair to the centre of the hearth, and proceeded to tell us of his doings up in the bell-tower. We always listened with interest ; for, as Ann shrewdly observed one day when his mother was out of hearing, " There was nothing Master Stephen liked so well as being made a god on ;" and as we were not often—or I may say, *ever*—disposed to thwart him, he was made a god of accordingly. After he had related all, he yawned audibly, stretched his lengthy limbs, and asked if Kathie were there ; I made answer that I was still in the presence.

" Oh, then, Kathie, you can't be half so tired as I am with those horrid bells !" cried he : " you

don't know how they make a fellow's arms ache ! I wish you would help me with that imposition that Withers gave me this morning. Do, that's a dear Kathie."

I had now approached the fireplace, so he put his arm round me coaxingly, and gave me a kiss ; of course, I immediately consented to write out the imposition, which called out a smile on my mother's face : she was always glad to see Stephen relieved of any burden. Her smile somehow irritated me, though for the moment I checked the expression of my jealous feeling.

" Then I'll go to bed, for I am famously tired," said my brother, pleasantly. " You know where the books are, Kathie ;" and having first sprinkled me with icy water from the pitcher, and trodden on Cherry the cat's tail, he took his departure singing.

When he was gone, my mother brought out her knitting again, though I am sure her eyes were tired, for the sake of keeping me company during the hour the imposition would take to write. I forget now how many lines of Latin verse it was,

but I remember thinking it as weary a task as the seam : both head, back, and fingers ached when it was done.

“ Well, Kathie, have you finished at last ? ” my mother asked, as I rose to put away the books.

“ Yes.”

I spoke sullenly, at which my mother looked surprised and grieved, but gently bade me warm my feet before going to bed.

“ They are not cold,” was my short reply.

“ Come, Kathie, I want to talk to you a little while,” she persisted, at the same time eyeing me wistfully.

I obeyed, but with a gesture of weariness and impatience.

“ Child, you look sick and ill : tell me what ails you. Is it that this hard-working life is wearing you out ? ” my mother asked, with a plaintive tone in her voice such as we were not used to hear.

I loved and revered her dearly, but her unconscious encouragement of Stephen’s selfishness that night had roused the dormant spark

of jealousy in my heart, and all my native sullenness rose up moody and resentful. After waiting a few minutes for an answer, which I was in too ill a humour to give, she added, "You are tired, Kathie; go to bed now; to-morrow we will talk." I took my candle without a word, and went.

My mother's ordinary manner was cold and quiet: she was not demonstrative in her affection as some women are, except to Stephen, who seemed little grateful for her love; and this had kept me further aloof than a daughter should be from her mother's heart and confidence. It was her nightly custom to come and see us in our beds before going to her own, and I knew she would not fail me for what had passed. As I went through her room, I stayed a moment to look at my little sisters; they were both fast asleep: Isabel with her sweet face lightly flushed, her red lips parted, and her golden brown hair escaping from her netted cap; Jean's soft pale features smiling in her sleep, and her round restless little arms tossed outside the coverlet:

they seemed so far, so very far removed from me, their elder sister! Gazing at them the tears gathered thick in my eyes, and, for a moment, I wondered if I could ever have been like them. Then I remembered that I never was; that I had been delicate and suffering, plain and solitary, and my heart felt these things as wrongs.

I moved away to my closet, and shut myself in. I never was a child who cried passionately, but I can remember times when I sat with folded hands on my knees, and out of the blind resentful soreness of my spirit rose a swelling flood of tears which fell like drops of a thunder shower. So sat I now, cold and shivering, on the edge of my bed, looking drearily at the stars in heaven and the Minster towers gleaming white in their shimmer. I was still there when my mother came in.

“What, not in bed yet, Kathie?” said she cheerfully. Then, seeing that I was crying, she took both my hands in hers, and bent forward to kiss me. “If my little Kathie knew how her mother loves her, she would not come and

fret here alone, instead of telling her trouble to the only heart in the world that would be sure to sympathize with her," she said. I laid my aching forehead down on her cool hands. "Think, Kathie, of what you have been to me, of what you may still be—my greatest help and comfort next to God; and then consider what I must feel to see you sullen and unhappy. If I could, my poor child, I would give you a good education, and amusements, and companions; but you know I cannot. I have worked hard all my life, and have been contented; if your lot is to be the same, take it patiently: there is One who can lighten your burden, and make it even easy to bear."

"I do not complain, mother," said I despondingly; "I can work; I do work: at least, I do my best."

"Yes, Kathie, you have been a good child always; you are industrious, obedient, unselfish: you have been friend as well as daughter to me."

"I know not what ails me to-night; I am full of wrong feelings; everything seems hopeless

and sad; I cannot be content; I am of no use to anybody."

"Kathie!"

My mother's gravely reproachful accent stung me. I went on speaking rapidly and bitterly, never thinking of the cruel stabs I was dealing.

"I am of no use to anybody; if I were dead nobody would miss me. Isabel would help Stephen, who is the only person cared for in this house. Stephen is first and last with every one. I am not like other girls: I never was. As a child I was always sickly, and now I am ugly, and a mere household drudge. If there is anything to fetch or carry, it is 'Kathie here, Kathie there:' I see no end of it, and I am sick of it already."

I had ceased crying, and looked straight in my mother's face: she was very white, and trembled excessively; she had dropped my hands, and stood a few paces off gazing at me almost shudderingly. When she spoke again, which was not for several minutes, her voice was so changed, so faint and low, that it sank into my

heart with strange power; it echoes there yet sometimes, with a thrill of remorse for my ungrateful cruelty to that good mother.

“Kathie, it shall be changed; you shall not have to complain again,” she said. “I thought I had done, and was doing, my mother-duties well: God knows my children’s welfare is my only care. I must have gone wrong, strangely wrong, somewhere.”

Her voice wavered and broke. I could not bear this: to hear my gentle long-suffering mother accuse herself to me—a sullen-tempered, wayward, petulant child! My arms were round her neck, and I had kissed her twice or thrice ere either spoke again. I felt her tears wet on my cheek, and then all the enormity of my passionate accusations smote me. I was more eager to retract than I had been to denounce.

“Oh, mother!” I sobbed in a broken whisper, “forget what I have said: I do not mean it. I would rather live on bread and water, and work day and night, than go away. Only love me,

mother: talk to me sometimes. Tell me of your own cares and trials."

"You fancy, Kathie, that to hear of my shortcomings and my young working days will bring you easier through your own; you are right: I never thought of that," interrupted my mother, holding me closely to her heart, and putting back the hair from my burning forehead that she might press her lips there. "I have been wrong—do not contradict, child, for I say I have. Many an hour's sewing might I have lightened with old-world stories, when I have suffered you to sit mute and sickening over the monotony of your life."

Her tender caresses exorcised the evil spirit; and as she spoke softly and lovingly, her words were like balm to my wounded heart.

"We will try to mend, Kathie, both of us: your mother must not lose her right hand yet. We should miss you sorely, my child, if you were gone away from us—Stephen as much as any. Don't be jealous of the poor boy; I love you all alike, but he is more dependent than

you, and more exacting. I know his faults: they will lessen as he grows older; they are the faults of his sex."

I looked surprised, and my mother smiled. "We will not enter on a discussion of masculine and feminine foibles now, Kathie," added she: "we shall both be better in bed. So good-night, my dear little Christmas gift, my pale winter blossom, good-night!"

VIII.

I knew that I was fully, freely forgiven; that when my mother went away into her own room she carried with her a tenderer sympathy for the child whose love had betrayed itself in over-jealous passion: but I could not pardon myself. No coldness, no impatience, had she ever shown me that I should accuse her of partiality: and as for work—had it not been her portion? was it not the portion of millions?

Weak that I was to fret and chafe under my

burden! My reflections were bitter but salutary. They showed me how easily I was discouraged, and how unworthy a successor I should be to that good mother whose fine, independent character I longed to emulate. My ambition of fifteen was to be self-sustained as she was; as free from all trammels of fashion and custom; yet had I been avowing myself sick already of the home-training under her eye and example, and wearying for a larger sphere wherein to exercise those faculties which yet could not stand alone amidst their narrow duties.

This outbreak of mine, so sincerely repented since, was not without its good results. It drew my mother and me closer together, and broke down the screen that had hitherto interposed between our hearts. Many a tale did I listen to which has come back to me in later years with a sanctifying strength; many a quaint shred of actual experience did I treasure up and bring forth in time of need. Insensibly, too, I exchanged the futile, dreamy, inner life I had been leading for one of higher feeling. I learnt that it is

worthier and greater to do the duty God has set before us than to aspire after that for which he has provided other and stronger hands. My mother's teaching by parables went home to my heart when drier lessons would have utterly failed; but even they could not always keep it from wandering after vague phantoms of happiness which should crown the unsatisfying present time; and though I began to take some pleasure in my round of duties, yet at intervals there would arise moments of rebellious disgust, during which I flew with added zest to the old books, and neglected everything else. Soon, however, followed self-condemnation and confession to my mother, whose tenderness and judgment I now trusted with implicit faith.

"Be assured, Kathie," she would say, "that the upbringing God is giving you is the one of all others to fit you for your future life. Self-denial, patience, and industry never come amiss: you may have more need of them some day than you have now. Take the present as God sends it, in all trust and humility."

And I endeavoured to do so: but an inward glow had much to do with my patience. I had a fanciful familiar who made golden tracery over the dull prosaic aspect of my daily life; who exalted my quiet mother into a heroine of social virtue, and my pretty sisters into fairy creatures. It was at this time, on Sunday afternoons, when everybody was gone to church and I kept house, that I began to string rhymes together and to weave foolish stories out of my wayward imagination. I enjoyed those brief Sabbath hours as our first parents might have enjoyed a return to Paradise after their expulsion.

IX.

About seven weeks after the circumstances just detailed, the clouds began to break, and the morning mists cleared off. There came for me a totally unexpected invitation to spend a month at my grandmother Brande's house at Crofton. In spite of effort and will, my health, never

strong, had during some time past been gradually sinking, until nothing was left of me but a pale, grey shadow with large brown eyes. I knew my mother watched me secretly : she thought—and I thought—that my thread of life was nearly spun from the reel ; but the chilly, matter-of-fact epistle of our kinswoman, indited in a strong, manly hand, revealed a glimpse of a renewed, invigorated life.

“ Only give me change—give me freedom—and I shall live,” I said : “ even pain—even struggle—anything but this slow stagnation.”

It was settled, therefore, that I should go to Crofton. It was a chance for me, and I grasped at it very eagerly. Life was new to me : I did not wish to die yet ; not till some glory had come over its blank places. My mother—I know not what was in her mind, what hopes or what fears—hurried forward the preparations for my departure, and I helped her with a will that must have seemed selfish ; but the instinct of self-preservation was alive within me, and I did not pause to think of her. Yet when it came to the actual parting, I

found it no light thing to leave home and every one who loved me, to go amongst strangers.

It was a journey of forty miles to Crofton, and this I undertook alone, one bright May morning, on the outside of the coach which passed through Eversley. There was a swelling in my throat for some time after we had got beyond Westgate; but soon the changing scene, the exhilarating rapidity of motion, and, above all, the full freight of hope I carried in my heart, drove away sorrow, and I began to look around.

It was not a beautiful country through which we travelled; but with its spring face on, any place is pleasant. The sun came out in fitful gleams, touching the emerald larches, which stood out distinctly against backgrounds of dark wood, and making broad shields of light on the stretches of meadow land, while the far-away wolds lay dusk in shadow. As I watched and pondered, all in my nature that was akin to beauty or poetry sprang up into vigorous life. From the brow of a steep hill, where the coach stayed to leave a passenger, I caught the last view of the three

towers of Eversley Minster, nearly thirty miles away : grey masses against a paler grey.

As, in the afternoon, we drew near to the end of the journey, both the scene and the weather changed. The road wound over a vast moor, with here and there a few stunted trees breaking its level, and patches of golden gorse coming into bloom. From the elevation of this moor the sea was visible ; and with its expanse, lost in hazy cloud in the distance, entered into my mind a vague idea of Eternity—the Unseen—the Illimitable.

The afternoon was chill and damp ; the water lay leaden-hued and sullen like a nether sky, while its plaintive, continuous moan came drifting on the slow air over the black moorland. My spirits went down, down to zero.

At last, by a steep and stony roadway, we entered the long, straggling street of a paltry market-town. The coach stopped at the door of an inn which looked as if it were falling into disrepute, so forlorn was the aspect of its hostess, so dejected that of the lame ostler with a straw in his mouth.

Here I left the coach, and was received by a gaunt woman in black, who had been waiting for me. She came forward ejaculating "Humph!" and eyed me with anything but a reassuring expression of countenance. I returned her gaze, and should probably have said "Humph!" too, but I was very small, very cold, and very hungry, quite unequal to a single-handed contest with that huge icicle in the mourning bonnet. My little trunk having been made over to the care of a man with a carrier's cart, my grandmother's woman seized my hand, and we set off to walk to Crofton, at a pace which soon left me no thought except for my extreme weariness. She strode along without rest or pause, admonishing me to put my best foot foremost, and never lightening the way with any word of cheer or welcome. She kept her grim face set like one of the stone visages on the Minster walls, that peered into my bedroom at home: ever since, she has been associated in my mind with those weatherbeaten goblins.

It was full two miles from the place where the

coach stopped to Crofton, but my grandmother's house stood first as we approached the village, enclosed in a large garden, green and shady. The lilacs and laburnums were out, and the budding sweetbriars filled the air with spicy fragrance.

I had just an impression of retirement and luxuriant vegetation on my mind, when my guide led me through an open door, across a hall chequered in diamonds of black and white stone, and into a bright little drawing-room, where I found myself in the presence of my grandmother. She was reading when we entered, but hastily pushed away her book, and stretched forth a hand, tremulous in spite of herself; I put mine into it, and when she had kissed me coldly on the cheek, she put me gently away, and turned to the fire without speaking. The woman in black coughed, and my grandmother looked up.

"It is a pity, Sharpe; he might have done so much better," said she, without any apparent reference to the subject under consideration,

namely myself. Sharpe assented gruffly, and glared down upon me from her majestic altitude like the ogres in old story-books. I began to feel excessively uncomfortable. My grandmother drew me towards the fire, felt my hands, which were as cold as stones, and bade me warm myself.

"She is a poor bit of a thing; it is scarcely possible she can be fifteen years old," she remarked in a soliloquizing tone, regarding me meantime as if I were a piece of inanimate matter. "If she is like her mother, it is more than ever a marvel to me what my son could see in her to admire."

"Men are so odd," suggested Sharpe, with a view to throwing light on the question. It flashed into my youthful mind to wonder whether anybody had been found *odd* enough to marry her. Nobody had.

Whilst undergoing my grandmother's scrutiny, I scanned her face. She appeared to be about sixty-five years old, was tall and stately in figure, but of a strong, harsh, unprepossessing counte-

nance; her brows were heavy and black; her features large and swollen with pride. I imagine that our critical examinations were mutually unpleasing, for I was soon dismissed.

The woman in black, who all this time had stood chafing her hands by the door, was ordered to take me up-stairs and make me ready for tea. I found it ill submitting to her needless and obtrusive services, and was rather chafed in temper when reconducted to the parlour door. She bade me "get in," and advised me to be on my best behaviour, as my grandmother was very particular. Thus encouraged, I stumbled awkwardly and shyly into the room, and was not surprised at being told I had no manners.

My grandmother was not alone when I entered: a little elderly lady, in a bonnet and cloak, occupied the sofa. The moment she saw me, she half rose, pressed her hands together, and gasped spasmodically.

"There, Bootle, that will do; we appreciate your sentiments to the very core of our hearts," said my kinswoman, frowning upon her from those

angry eyes of hers. "Don't make a scene, pray; if you are going to be lachrymose, take the child away, and cry over her up-stairs: I know you are longing to do it."

And to my intense surprise, I was hustled out of the room, and conveyed by the little old lady to the top of the house. She ushered me into a large room, where a fire was burning, or rather smouldering, in the grate, and bidding me take one chair, deposited herself on another; then turning up her dress, to save it from being scorched, she planted her feet on the fender. I wondered who she could be, that took possession of me as a piece of rightful property: not my aunt Aurelia, surely—she looked as old as my grandmother.

"They are very cold, my dear," said she, nodding at her feet, "very cold: pinched." I gave the fire a poke, and made a blaze, for which she checked me: "Don't, child! it spoils the complexion! Hand me that screen, please!" I obeyed. "Now don't be impatient! you will know all in good time. I was sure it was to be so, and it makes me happy—very happy. When Mrs.

Brande has made up her mind to say a thing, she says it; or to do a thing, she does it; or to go anywhere, she goes, to her point at once: as the crow flies; straight across the country."

The old lady spoke in short jerking sentences, each emphasized by a nod of her head. I entertained doubts of her sanity, she was so very queer looking—not to say unpleasant or ugly. She wore a front of pale drab curls, the centre one drooping over her forehead, and many others piled aloft; her features were very small and withered, full of lines and fine wrinkles; her eyes light blue; her teeth prominent, and her complexion dull as parchment, and as colourless. Her dress was remarkable for the brilliance of its ill-assorted colours, and its general fluttering effect; which gave me to understand that Miss Bootle had not yet abandoned her pretensions to juvenility and fascination.

"Oh, Charlie!" exclaimed she suddenly; "wee, pet Charlie!" and she began tearing off her bonnet and cloak in frantic haste, bewildering me more and more every minute. She cast a

cap highly decorated with pink ribbons on her head, twisted a lace pelerine over her shoulders, and then bade me come away, and be introduced to her sanctum. We descended to the first floor and went down a long passage. At the outside of a door at the end of it she paused, and said mysteriously, "In this room your father learnt his lessons when he was a little boy. I taught him, and your Aunt Aurelia too. I am your grandmother's companion now."

She admitted me into a dull unfurnished apartment which was henceforth a haunted chamber to me. As she entered, a little white kitten sprang from the couch, and ran to meet her with a cry of pleasure peculiar to pet kittens: she stooped down, and it crept into her arms, patted her face with its gloves on, and showed satisfaction in every way of which it was capable.

"You see, my dear, something loves me: nice, wee Charlie does, bless him!" cried she, fondling the pretty soft thing in the most affectionate way. "He is *my own*: he knows my step and my

voice, and does not care that I am ugly. When I have been chilled down-stairs—shivering—I come up here and Charlie quite warms me: he is a comfort to me, a very great comfort.”

She put him on the couch and laid her face on the cushion: the kitten crept up and made a dash at her cap, which he clawed off, and then he attacked her curls, which were presently reduced to the state and roughness of tow. All the time she continued to address him by the most caressing terms: he was her treasure, her lammie, her darling, her sweet sweetening; yet, ludicrous as these endearments were as applied to that snowball of a kitten, there was something inexpressibly pathetic about them too, which raised the poor companion many degrees in my estimation. Charlie begged play for a long while; he darted round the room, scuttled up the window curtains, hid behind chairs and in empty bookshelves, while through all his manœuvres his mistress followed him with an agility quite laughable and surprising. This

exercise over, she rang the bell, and a servant entered with a cup.

“Charlie’s milk, Jane,” said Miss Bootle.

“Yes, ma’am, I’ve brought it;” and the cup being placed on the window seat, Charlie jumped up, plunged his little mouth into it, and was oblivious of both of us for five minutes.

Meanwhile, Miss Bootle produced a round basket lined with blue wadded silk, and having two long strings attached to the handle. I wondered what she was going to do with it: when Charlie had finished his supper I saw. Being fully replenished he was no longer frisky, and submitted to be put into the basket, where he coiled himself round, blinking drowsily, and licking his lips. His mistress then opened the window, and proceeded to lower him into the garden very gently, but swiftly; when the strings were all run out she gave them a little jerk and fastened them by a loop to the button of the blind.

“There, my dear,” said she; “perhaps you never saw that done before. I took the idea

from the Bible—St. Paul let down by the wall in a basket. It answers remarkably well. While we are at tea, Charlie takes his little constitutional, trots about the shrubbery, and prances up his favourite holly bush. When I come up again I shall tug at the strings: I can tell by the weight whether he is in the basket: if not, I call until he comes and gets in; then I draw him up. Don't you think it immensely clever of him, my dear?"

I replied that I thought it perfectly delightful; whereupon she kissed me impetuously, and called me a treasure. At this moment Sharpe appeared and proclaimed severely that tea had been waiting three minutes and a half. Miss Bootle hastily settled her cap. "Shall I do—am I all straight?" she asked, and without giving me time to say "No," seized my hand and pranced down-stairs as if she had imbibed some of Charlie's vivacity.

Mrs. Brande was seated at the table when we appeared, with a white-headed man-servant in attendance. I took a seat beside her, and the companion placed herself opposite, her face

alight with smiles, its wrinkles even half smoothed out.

My grandmother happening to look towards her, attacked her with asperity. "Bootle, you are intoxicated! why do you come to tea with your hair all touzled in that way?" she asked in her deep voice; "what a silly thing you are with that ridiculous kitten. I shall order Sharpe to drown it; she will like the office."

"Oh, don't, please!" cried I dismayed, whilst a tear trickled down the poor old companion's nose; "it is the nicest little cat I ever saw."

The man-servant who was filling the tea-pot from the urn paused and coughed, and Miss Bootle looked aghast, whilst I, in blissful ignorance of the storm I might arouse, reiterated my petition for Charlie.

"Tush, child, you take me in earnest!" said my grandmother placably; "Bootle may wear her kitten for a bow in her bonnet if she likes."

The tear vanished, and we all breathed freely once more.

When the companion had recovered from the temporary shock to her feelings, she proceeded to narrate some of the gossip which she had collected during her afternoon's walk: especially she dilated on the misfortune which had befallen a neighbouring family, in the breaking off of the eagerly desired marriage of one of its many daughters.

My grandmother cut her expressions of regret short. "Stuff, Bootle, don't cant to me! I know the world," was her testy remark. "People never are sorry for the misfortunes of their friends; it is a little pleasant excitement to talk about them."

The companion ventured on a mild dissent, but was instantly frowned into silence.

"Pshaw! Mrs. Froude may be sitting in sack-cloth and ashes, and Sybil may be tearing her red hair at this minute, for anything *you* care: at all events their distresses have not taken away your appetite. How many times have you helped yourself to marmalade?"

The poor old lady had a liking for this

condiment, and was silent for at least three minutes after the rebuff; but she had a happy elasticity of temper, and soon expanded again. She looked at me tenderly, heaved a sort of gasping sigh, and said in an undertone, "This is truly delightful: I feel perfectly comfortable; if I may be pardoned the expression, I may say that I feel like a balloon, or a kite—soaring!"

"*Don't* be an idiot, Bootle," snapped my kinswoman; "I wish you would leave that nonsense up-stairs with your cat and your curl-papers."

This quite extinguished the little old lady; she put on a deeply aggrieved expression of countenance, and spoke no more. This gave her mistress the opportunity of asking if she were feeling like a balloon in a state of collapse, or a kite without a tail; but no reply was elicited, unless a tear which trickled down her nice, kind, old face might be called one.

I had already set down my grandmother as a bitter, cynical, ill-tempered, unloveable woman; and ranged myself as friend and supporter of the

companion. When tea was over, the former fell asleep in her chair; Miss Bootle ascertained the fact by coughing gently, and as this did not elicit any rebuke we were sure she was safe, and escaped up-stairs to the school-room.

“Now for bonnie Prince Charlie!” cried the old lady, gaily skipping to the window. She pulled at the strings: “Yes, he is in. Now, don’t speak, child! I am nervous about drawing him up; my heart goes pit-a-pat: I don’t know what I should do if I upset him.”

Very slowly and carefully she drew in the strings, and soon the basket came in sight with the kitten just waking out of a nap and sticking up his back; she lifted him out carefully, kissed him, and covered him up in a soft woollen shawl kept for the purpose.

“Now, my dear, I am going to put him to sleep for the night, so don’t make any noise!”

She began to walk about the room, hushing him in her arms as if he had been an infant; singing nursery rhymes in a thin cracked voice, and purring over him like an old mother-cat.

Detecting a smile on my face she stopped and said quietly; "My dear, don't laugh at me. If you live you may become as lonely and as unlovely as I am. People say that every soul has its fellow, but mine has not found its other half yet, so I suspect I must have been born odd. One must love something, so I am content to love Charlie, who does not despise me because I am old, plain, poor, and dependent."

I felt quite ashamed of myself for seeing any thing absurd in her proceedings, as she resumed her march and her song. Presently she said in a whisper Charlie was going over nicely; then that she feared he showed symptoms of wakefulness; and finally that he was fast asleep: she then laid him gently down on the sofa-cushion, kissed, blessed, and covered him up. "There he will sleep till morning, my dear, and when I look in I shall find him sitting at the corner of the table, watching the door. He will have milk; and if it is fine, he will be let down into the garden in his basket; if not, I shall smuggle him into the drawing-room in my apron,

and keep him there while I read aloud to your grandmamma. Now, come away to my bed-room: I have something else to show you."

I followed, nothing loth, for I greatly preferred the poor companion's society to that of my grim kinswoman. We returned to the attic chamber, and unlocking the top drawer of an old bureau, Miss Bootle took thence a worn portfolio.

"My dear, do you recognise that portrait?" she asked mysteriously, offering me a small water-colour drawing of a boy in dress between a Highlander and a brigand. I replied that I did not. "You astonish me! then he must have been changed. It is your father, my dear. I drew it myself."

"Will you tell me something about him, Miss Bootle?"

"He was a good boy, my dear, but not much like others. I should say he would have been an excellent and valuable character but for a peculiarity he had. I should call him a boy of one idea: some chimera would take possession

of him, and to it he sacrificed everything for the time being. I always wondered whether this habit grew upon him or wore off."

"I think it grew upon him."

"Indeed! I feared so. It was the source of much vexation to his mother. With his fine talents he might have risen high in his profession: but they were so ill-regulated."

"I loved my father very dearly: he was always kind to us."

"He could not be actively unkind to anything; but neglect is sometimes as bad in its effects. My dear, I would not hurt your feelings on any account, but truth is truth, and fact is fact. There might have been a reconciliation with his mother if he had been less absorbed. Though she might be in the wrong, as a son, it was his place to make the first step towards it."

"Why did they quarrel?"

"There was no quarrel, so to speak, but a gradual estrangement. Then his marriage was a deep offence; she never forgave it."

"My mother is good and clever. She kept

things together: I do not know what would have become of us but for her," I said hastily, for I was really hurt at the implied reproach.

"I am sure she is good. I always said to Mrs. Brande that she was exactly the wife for her son: so homely, careful, and full of thought for others. But she was mortified that he did not consult her. Would you like to have that portrait, my dear."

I thanked her, but declined it, for though it might remind her of a beloved pupil, as I remembered my father only a grey-haired man, it would be valueless to me. She restored it, therefore, to the portfolio and the bureau.

At eight o'clock, to my great surprise, Sharpe arrived, and marched me off to bed. I came to open strife with her almost immediately, for she would treat me as if I had not the proper use of my limbs or reasoning faculties. The result of my demonstration was that her services were withdrawn, and I was left in the free exercise of my independence. Thus ended my first night away from home.

X.

The next morning I was up and out by dawn, though, for the present, my researches were confined to the garden and shrubberies. The latter were prettily embellished with wild flowers, which grew under the trees and in sheltered spots luxuriantly. I gathered a few, and having made them into a posy, laid them by my grandmother's plate on the breakfast table. When she came in she took them in her hand, and remarked "So your mother's daughter has taste;" but she threw them aside, and they were swept away by Sharpe with the breakfast crumbs. The meal over, all the establishment came in to prayers, which were read by Miss Bootle. It was only a short ceremony, but too long for Charlie: he did not relish his constrained position in his mistress's apron, and having made his escape, he ran up her back, where, just below the waist, he found what seemed an eligible place for taking repose;

perhaps he did not poise himself carefully, or else the cushion was less substantial than it looked, for he fell with an obtrusive rustle to the carpet, and was seized by the nape of his neck by Sharpe, who shook him viciously, and without intermission, till she rose from her knees, when she looked perfectly unconscious, and austere devout.

The servants being all gone out of the room, Miss Bootle brought forth a large volume of very dry theological exterior, and prepared to read aloud; but her patroness bade her be quiet and hold her tongue, as she had something to talk about to me. She then proceeded to ask multitudinous questions about those at home, our way of life, and our prospects, especially Stephen's. She received my details with short grunts of approbation, and once remarked that my mother had more worldly wisdom than she had given her credit for. It happened frequently that in speaking of what was past, my father's name recurred, and where any allusion suggested the poverty of our home, she winced visibly; and I detected a dim remorse in her stony eyes as

I spoke of the necessities his death entailed upon us. She continued to hover about the subject for a long time after I ceased to speak, asking desultory questions, and returning again and again to the theme of her son's death and its consequences.

Sharpe's entry with a pile of coarse sewing broke in upon the subject, and it was not then resumed. I had a task portioned out to me, and Miss Bootle was called upon to read aloud.

Thrice during the morning was sentence of death passed upon Charlie: once for his behaviour at prayers, a second time for making free with a ball of worsted on the carpet, and a third for springing at the pendant curl of Miss Bootle's front while she was reading. The bell even was ordered to be rung for Sharpe to execute the sentence, but as I instantly showed symptoms of tears, he was reprieved, and condemned to perpetual banishment from the drawing-room. I had quite adopted the little animal into my affections, for he seemed the only free and happy thing about the house.

The hours were very long, for Miss Bootle's book was dry and her voice monotonous: so teasingly monotonous that I could not abstract my thoughts from it, though I was wearying all the while to have my feet on the cool pleasant grass, and to hear, nearer at hand, the voice of that mighty sea whose plaintive moan I had heard on the moorland, and in the dead of the night. The whole of that day, however, I was kept in-doors. Miss Bootle and I revolved between the drawing-room, the school-room, and the attic, amusing ourselves as we could, but chiefly with Charlie. I had asked for a book, but being accommodated with "The History of the War," I had soon relinquished it as unattractive reading. The latter part of the afternoon we spent in turning over the contents of the portfolio, where I saw portraits of Miss Bootle's friends, relatives, and pupils, who all bore a strong family resemblance to each other; they all possessed blue eyes, more or less globular, Greek outlines of feature, and a uniform insipidity, or rather lack of expression.

When we at last descended to the drawing-room, towards tea-time, my grandmother was not alone; she had a visitor, who, as I gathered from subsequent conversation, was the curate of Crofton, Mr. Mayne. He made way for us to approach the fire, but I was bade impatiently to take my place at the table, and be quiet. I instantly obeyed, though not much daunted by mere ill-temper. Nature did not make me originally of a feeble or cowardly soul, though time and other things have much subdued it since then.

As I had nothing to do but to eat my bread and butter, I made private reflections, observations, and speculations on what I saw and heard. The Curate was a young man, recently ordained, who, as I judged from his talk, held very lofty views of the duties and responsibilities of his office: something in his words warmed and stirred my heart, as did the noble thoughts and aspirations that I met in the old plays. Still I saw that beneath what was good, and spiritual, and self-denying in him, there lurked vast

ambition, and much restless, vivid, ever-increasing dissatisfaction with his narrow position. I liked his countenance, though its features were marked and irregular; it was the stamp of strength and purpose in it that pleased me, and perhaps also some chord unsounded till then in my mind, sympathized with his ardent, rebellious, uncurbed temperament. I marvelled what had made him a priest of peaceful times; for he seemed, at heart, as eager for strife and conquest as ever was youthful soldier who has scented glory on his first battle-field.

To all he said my grandmother listened with an air of polite endurance—she thought him visionary and unpractical; the poor companion, to whom he was very courteous, was tearfully and gustily responsive. She assured him, from time to time, that she understood him, and agreed with him. There was an every-day side to his character, of less interest than his better self. In speaking of individuals and circumstances, he could be sarcastic and merciless: he had an instinctive repulsion for all false-seemings, mean-

nesses, and bland, social hypocrisies; he testified no pity for weakness, no sympathy for repentant error. My grandmother, with all her harshness, was scarcely less genial than he when he got amongst the follies and foibles of people whom they knew.

XI.

The following morning, immediately after prayers, when I saw the work-basket and big volume about to come into action again, I took my courage in my two hands, and preferred a request for permission to go out. Both grand-mamma and Miss Bootle had objections to raise, but I contrived to overrule them all, and to extort a reluctant leave of absence until noon.

In his rare moments of social expansion, wonderful tales of his birthplace had I heard my father tell. There the trees in the woods were taller and of fuller foliage than elsewhere; the birds that built in them were the finest of

choristers ; the garden flowers boasted richer odours and more glowing tints ; there the sea raved more boisterously in winter weather, and in summer time rolled more wooingly up the sands, than on other coasts. I made no allowance for the bright medium of boyish recollection through which he viewed it ; and, finding the sparkle of the May sun over all, I was not disappointed very much.

But there were no cliffs, no beetling rocks hanging darkly over the inflowing tide, each with its awful legend of shipwreck, its echoes of wild cries of drowning men coming out of low-browed caverns with freezing whisper. As the sea was there, it touched me with no awe. Far out, it lay still as a lake ; and nearer, where the waters came tumbling over a reef of black rocks, it dashed its spray playfully into the air, and then came rolling, spreading, gliding up to my very feet. There was a single ship in sight ; its sails, which caught the sunshine, looked like the outspread wings of some great sea-bird ; and a few tiny fishing-boats, rocked by the slow motion of

the waves, lay mere specks on the shadowed water. I watched them for a little while, and saw how the drifting clouds moved along the face of the deep, chasing the sunshine before them, and then parting and letting it break through ; never repeating their forms or effects, but wandering in infinite variety. Then, with the eternal sea-chant in my ears, and the wind in my teeth, I moved on under the range of low sand-hills that fringed the beach. There were points in the distance—rocks, I felt sure, from the clear outline they cut against the sky—and in the hope of reaching the nearer of the two, I pressed forward ; though the breeze was both cold and strong : already it seemed to quicken the vital current in my veins, and to give me the spring of renewed life. I walked forward for an hour, and then my feet began to lag, for the points seemed still as far off as ever ; but, not liking to yield my whim altogether, I turned my back to the wind, to rest and take breath before proceeding.

While I stood thus, watching the foam-flecked tide creeping momentarily higher, a voice behind me

said, " You are not like the crows : they always face the wind."

I turned round startled : it was Mr. Mayne who spoke.

" Where are you bound for—the Nab ?" he asked.

I answered by pointing at the high rock.

" I thought so ; but you must turn back with me, for it is seven miles away, and the tide would carry you off long before you could reach it. Come."

I was very reluctant to accept my disappointment, and asked several questions as to the attainability of the Nab at any time.

" You cannot reach it within half a mile, even during the neap tides," was his reply. " The rock rises sheer from the water, perpendicular as a wall. It is very dangerous to vessels off the coast in foggy weather : many ships have been lost there. It is the pleasantest to view from a distance."

I turned back, and trudged homewards beside him, finding him pleasant company ; for he was

not too proud to answer my trivial questions, neither had he any coldness or fantastic reserve of manner to repel a child. He told me of a wreck which had happened during the preceding winter, and had several stories which gave that low, reef-bound coast a darker interest than its humble features would have led me to suspect.

“And why do the rooks face the wind?” I asked, when the sea stories were done.

“Because they dislike to have their feathers ruffled,” was the reply. “They resemble most of us in that respect. I think, though, our difficulties would be less if we fronted them steadily, instead of turning away or trying to cower into the nearest shelter. Do you understand me, little girl?”

I glanced up into his thoughtful face, and answered that I did, and then he talked on again, sometimes plainly, sometimes mystically. I could not follow him always; and, seeing this, he descended to my level.

When we came to the garden-gate, he shook hands, saying, “We are friends, child, are we not?”

I responded gaily, "Yes;" and very proud of the title my little heart was.

As I entered the house, grandmamma met me, and asked if it was not Mr. Mayne with whom I had just parted. I replied that it was.

"And, pray, what did he find to talk about to a child like you?" she added.

"Oh! many things: the sea, and birds, and thoughts that people have on unseen matters. I like him."

"That is very probable; strange, unpractical man that he is," was my grandmother's comment. "It very often happens that clever men like him are attracted by what is homely in young girls. Go and take off your bonnet."

XII.

If my grandmother's household had been regulated by clock-work it could scarcely have moved more mechanically than it did. Order and punctuality were with her cardinal virtues, and as

I cautiously avoided transgressing either, I gained gradually on her good opinion. At first it was impossible to avoid seeing that she treated me with a scarcely veiled contempt, but after the lapse of a week she began to talk to me freely both of my father, my aunt Aurelia, and herself. She was a very proud old woman, and had met with severe disappointments in life, which her peculiar temper magnified into perpetual wrongs; there was an especial soreness on the subject of her son's marriage. I may be forgiven for feeling that my mother was far more of the true gentlewoman than she who despised her; little as she had lived in society, and full of small cares and economies as her whole experience had been.

One evening after tea, when Miss Bootle and I were thinking of making our retreat to the freer regions of the school-room, my grandmother bade me remain, and hear something she had to say to me.

"Kathie, I am going to send you to school, that you may learn to be of some definite use

to your family," she began. I coloured, and my heart throbbed fast as she continued. "It was with that view I sent for you to Crofton; I wanted to see what sort of stuff you were made of."

She paused, and looked me full in the face; I did not seek to evade her steady passionless scrutiny, but returned her gaze with one as calm, while my pulse settled again to its even beat, and I listened intently for what was to come next. It was not particularly complimentary.

"I imagine you to possess the elements of a plain, sensible, common-place character, and you will do respectably when your spirit is tamed: at present, you have too much to get forward comfortably, for you would always be coming in contact with other people's prejudices; and as you have your own way to make in the world, the sooner your temper ranges with your fortunes the better."

I ventured to hint at the possibility of my mother's objecting to my leaving home for long together.

"Nonsense, child! Don't be a goose!" interrupted my grandmother testily. "She will not

be so foolish as to stand in your light. It is something for you to be able to earn your own bread decently: you have nothing but work to look forward to; and if you are well taught yourself you can educate your sisters—have a school, in short, which may prove an independence for all of you.”

That was a promising truth, and immediately a vision of what I might one day do for my mother rose up before my mind’s eye. “I should like to be a teacher,” was my prompt reply.

“Of course you will like it; it is the one course for which you are fitted,” said my grandmother, in a cold disenchanting tone: “you seem to have average ability, some perseverance, and some energy. You will not be easily turned back from your purposes, neither will you weakly sicken over a monotonous duty. I do not see that you are either sensitive or enthusiastic, so there will be the less disappointment for you, as you will not be apt to look beyond your sphere, and so to neglect the mediocre happiness that lies under your hand.”

As my grandmother with calm deliberation enunciated these opinions, a conviction stole into my mind that she was describing not what she thought I was, but what she wished me to be. Perhaps she read in my eyes a protest against her judgment, for she added in a severe tone, "Nothing is more frivolous or ridiculous than an ambitious, restless woman. She is a sin against the unity of nature,—an anomaly: Kathie, you understand me. Remember, your work will rise before you day by day, and that to be safe and respectable you must adhere steadily to the beaten tracks of life, like other people. Mr. Mayne would be a far happier man if he were not so visionary: while he is flying after Utopian schemes, substantials escape him."

Miss Bootle ventured to coincide in this sentiment, but was instantly snubbed into silence.

"If," my grandmother resumed, "if your mother should object to my plan for sending you to school, which I do not anticipate, I shall keep you under my own eye. I will not have you wasted. Bootle may teach you, if she has not

forgotten everything herself; and if she has, we will send her off and find somebody else."

The persecuted companion looked meekly and tearfully surprised. "Oh, madam! pray consider it again!" cried she plaintively; "thirty-nine years have I lived in this house—"

"Well, what of that?" snapped her patroness. "You do not expect that I shall keep you, and pay you money, when you are of no use?" The poor old lady retired to the window to weep unseen, and to bathe Charlie's coat with her tears: I do not think even he could have comforted her under the threatened dismissal.

"I shall write to your mother to-morrow, Kathie, so if you have anything to say, you had better say it at once," added my kinswoman, looking grimly satisfied at having made somebody miserable.

"I should like to go to school, and in the meantime to have a complete holiday," I boldly responded. My grandmother slightly protruded her nether lip, and asked what I meant. "To be as idle as I please: to come and go when and where I like."

"A pretty demand truly! but perhaps not very unreasonable, all things considered. Well, you may have a rest, and Sharpe, who has nothing to do, can walk out with you."

"Thank you, grandmamma, but I should not quite like such a giant's castle handmaiden for my companion."

A grim smile relaxed my relative's features. "I wish Sharpe heard you," said she; "you must have her or nobody: I cannot spare Bootle to go gadding about the country, though I dare say she would like it." I replied that solitary excursions had a singular charm for me, and that I had no fear of going out alone.

"Humph! I hope your brain is not filled with a farrago of nonsense! There, get away and do what you like for a fortnight; only let me hear no more about it. Bootle, put that cat out of the room and do something sensible."

Armed with my grandmother's permit to enjoy myself, I really did it, and found being at Crofton extremely pleasant. I liked the garden quietness, where nobody came but myself, and the lonely

sea-shore and the bleak moorland. It was perhaps not the most healthy way of life for a child; but ah! how delightful I thought it. First, there was that, to me, rarest of luxuries, complete idleness; a peaceful folding of the hands—a dreamy vacancy. My mind took a fair aspect in the spring sunshine: coloured by external influences it grew brighter, stronger, happier, and more hopeful. I saw before me a future of some promise: the opportunity of mental culture, and the consequent opening out of new mines of enjoyment; girls like myself for companions, friends possibly; the capability to work worthily, and release from the blind, monotonous toil of ignorance—I know not what.

Day-dreams all! There was, too, a weft of even brighter gold than these gleaming across the deader tints of the mingled warp, but it was so light, airspun, and intangible, that but for its beauty, and its genial influence on my temper, it would scarce deserve a name at all. Imagination is amenable to no rules: grandmamma said mine was ill-regulated, and perhaps she was right; nevertheless I would not have exchanged it for

much solid worldly pomps and vanities. It was a fortune inexhaustible, and thus early, nothing had warned me that it might be drawn on too extravagantly.

I travel but slowly over the preface to my life; I love to remember this time when I hovered only on the threshold of the storied years, waiting and longing, until Fate should give me the true "Open Sesame!" and cause the gates to fall back before my eager steps. If Fancy hung those secret chambers with too gorgeous tapestries, and accumulated within them more treasures and more joys than could be counted over in many life-times, was she to blame? If she altogether ignored the skeleton-closet, and filled the house with airs of perpetual summer, was it unwise?

No matter how these things appear to initiated eyes; let those who have possession of dreamland keep it: I verily believe it is worth the fee simple of many landed estates. Leave to the vision of youth the glory of its hopeful fancies. Practical and disappointed people may hold to their transient realities, but they may chance to find

that in the long run they are of intrinsically less value than the mind's wealth they endeavour to despise as emptiness and vanity.

XIII.

When my mother's answer to grandmammina's proposal for my education arrived, I was not surprised to find that she objected to my being sent to school, on the plea that my health was precarious; but she assented to my remaining, for the present, at Crofton, which was the alternative stipulated for. I was rather glad at first, but soon found that I had no great reason to congratulate myself on the change, for self-guidance, independence, and holidays were gone for all intents and purposes. Grandmamma said that I had no judgment, and must have no will of my own. My education was in a manner to begin, and poor Miss Bootle being, after trial, found too easy and perfectly incompetent, her place was supplied by another lady who had a

theory, and believed in the strengthening power of the abstruse sciences as applied to the feminine idiosyncrasy. I was accordingly put through a severe course of them, to the general confusion of my mind, and the very, very frequent reddening of my eyes. Grandmamma upheld the theory with her authority, Mr. Mayne encouraged me to be submissive and do my best, and dear Miss Bootle, who stayed on sufferance, while Miss Palmer lodged in the village ready to supplant her at a moment's notice, consoled me, and endeavoured to elucidate the mysteries of hard words, which fenced my studies like a *chevaux de frise*.

Ah! what pains they took to make me good, and elegant, and clever! I wonder they were not discouraged—I often was. My head used to throb, and my face to burn; I had bad dreams at night, and woke crying over a pitiable haze of troubles: my brain was always at work, waking and sleeping; for, being conscientious, I strove with my difficulties, and did battle with obstinate lessons, while I felt myself growing

more stupid and incapable every day. My greatest satisfaction was to sit on the school-room floor with Charlie in my lap; but even then my hand always held before my dazed eyes the "elements" of something. The sea had lost its charm for me. Its mournful sounds confused me till I was almost idiotic; when I did go down to the shore, it was only to sit and watch the foam lapping the golden sand, and to cry quietly to myself. My mind was then absolutely vacant, unless the gnawing pain of inanition that possessed it might be called a tenant. I never thought of mentioning this in my letters home; I was told that it was my duty to make an effort to learn: and besides, I was not given to complaint; so I carried a French Prayer-book to church, and read the daily lessons in an Italian Bible, and followed, as far as it lay in my power, the path of wisdom by Miss Palmer laid down.

At length the theory produced its practical results. The little strength and spirits that I had at first imbibed, soon fell away again, and left me more weak and ailing than before. Grandmamma

was angry, and tried to spur me on by sharp, sarcastic speeches, and constantly repeating her conviction that I was either hopelessly dull or irreclaimably idle; Miss Palmer lamented that notwithstanding all her exertions I was painfully deficient in arithmetic and the more occult branches of education; even Miss Bootle reproached me with tears and caresses. It disappointed everybody that, with such advantages, I was not turning out a shining character; but they did not give me up yet: instead, they applied the screw tighter than ever. I tried hard to satisfy them, and in the effort broke down altogether. Six months after my arrival at Crofton, I lay a prostrate, helpless invalid; condemned by the doctors, and watched over with angry anxiety by grandmamma.

My mother came to me in haste, and great indeed was the comfort of her presence. But she stayed not long; I could not be removed, neither could the little ones at home be left. They promised to send for her again if—if there was *any change*, and I saw her go with an apathy

too blank even for tears. For a little while grandmamma's friends brought their condolences and their hopes; but as I lingered, lingered on through tedious weeks and months, the excitement passed, and my shaded room saw visitors but rarely. Even grandmamma tired of my pale, mute presence, and resumed all her usual habits of receiving company. I suffered at times extremely; but Miss Bootle said I bore my cross with patience: my prayer was that I might not bear it long, for it was exceeding heavy. They talked about me without reserve—especially the companion and the nurse—as if they imagined physical weakness and pain must dull my mind. But it was not so: in that calm of a sick room the clouds were falling away from it, and leaving it clear.

One night—how well I remember it!—Miss Bootle, Sharpe, and the nurse, talked softly together; I had been dreaming, and heard their voices between sleeping and waking.

“We cannot wish her to live: her sufferings are very great, and the doctors give no hope

of cure." It was the poor old companion who spoke.

"Poor lile bairn, I love her like my own!" said the nurse; "what a sweet, meek face she has: it looks oft as if she were in heaven already!"

Miss Bootle sobbed and called me a "poor dear!"

"She might live to be quite an old woman in this way: better one day and worse another, like Miss Donner at the Bank," said Sharpe.

"But her mind is gone. I hope it will please God to take the child to himself rather than visit her with such affliction," returned Miss Bootle; and coming near the bed to look at me she perceived that I had heard all.

"And I hope so too," I added with a smile; and then the tears came. It was sad to die so young, but sadder still the prospect of such a future!

Through two tedious years I lay in that quiet room. From my pillow I could see the branches bent by winter snows; budding into deep, shadow-

waving green, fading to autumn-brown and November bare. I had no change of days: it was a long Sabbath, any hour of which might have passed me forward to the Eternal one. Four times my mother journeyed from Eversley to see me, and four times we bade each other what we deemed might be a last adieu.

I regard these two years as part of my education—the best part perhaps. Such strong, happy thoughts kept me company sometimes. Released from the cramping irons of that dreadful theory, my heart and mind had room to grow. Nature, overwrought, gave way: left to herself, after exacting the due amount of pains and penalties for her broken laws, she began to revive in my veins. Long before others noticed the change, I felt the life-current rising and glowing in my limbs; writhing pain and pitiable weakness left me; insensibly my feet receded from the shadowy land on whose confines they had hovered so long, and my spirits plumed themselves for a new flight. It was almost as one rising from the dead; the doctors regarded me as a miracle, and

the nurse said prophetically, sure I was preserved for a purpose.

From my sick-bed I was, at length, transferred to a couch in the school-room, where I was kept for weeks clad in grave and antique raiment, and petted with small attentions from everybody. Grandmamma's friends came to see me again, and again sent messages; but my most frequent and favourite visitor was Mr. Mayne. He always brought some amusing story which diverted my thoughts; he had a cheerful voice, and the pleasant, but rare, faculty of soothing nervous irritability such as mine. I was deeply grateful to him, but do not remember that I troubled him with many thanks. He came and went as he liked: at first only a quiet influence, but almost, ere I knew it, a necessity to me; for if he stayed away three days together, I always contrived to fret myself with foolish and frivolous anxieties; which, however, his quick step on the gravel below the school-room window speedily exorcised.

XIV.

As soon as I was sufficiently recovered to go down-stairs, to my great dismay, the theory began to be spoken of again; but good Dr. Martin annihilated it at a single blow.

"She is deplorably ignorant, Dr. Martin; we must resume her education immediately," said grandmamma.

"At your peril, madam!" cried the physician, startled into plain speaking.

"Then what is to be done? She knows nothing, literally nothing. Miss Palmer's admirable theory had no chance before."

The irascible old gentleman consigned the theory to a nameless limbo. "She will do, madam, if you will let her alone," he added apologetically: "I suppose she can read and write: when her mind is ready to work, it will work; and will do far more than if it were laced

up in any theory whatever. Meddle with it now, and the consequences will be such as I do not care to name."

It was fortunate that a friend so sensible undertook my cause, for everybody conspired to pity me for the disadvantages under which I laboured. My grandmother contemplated me with a dreary and silent commiseration; Miss Palmer, in full receipt of her salary, came daily, and strove to administer the theory in feeble little bits of conversation; and Miss Bootle improved every opportunity of giving me useful information on trifles that had been familiar to me from my sixth year: I distinctly recollect her laboriously explaining to me that a quadruped was an animal with four legs, like Charlie. By dint of seeing myself so continually pitied, I grew to have an overwhelming sense of my deficiencies: the presence of strangers was painful and confusing to me, and I clung to my couch-corner in the school-room as to a harbour of refuge.

It is probable that I should at length have sunk into a state of physical and mental inertness, piti-

able and miserable, had not Mr. Mayne proposed to give me an occasional lesson in such things as I had a taste for. To this grandmamma acceded with a sigh of relief; Miss Palmer and the theory got their dismissal, and I was handed over to the Curate and Miss Bootle, to be taught or let alone as circumstances appeared to direct. I need scarcely say that this arrangement was perfectly satisfactory to me: I believe it was so to all the parties concerned in it.

I could not have given myself a reason for it then, but I felt glad to be with Mr. Mayne, and to listen to him as he talked to me like the child I was no longer, and yet without appearing to depreciate my understanding. He was as cordial and outspoken as an elder to a younger brother. It is my belief that, at this time, he did not recognise the woman in me at all, but merely a mind that sympathized with his, and responded like a far-away echo to his own thoughts and feelings: a receptive vessel for his overflowing fancies—nothing more. I remember one evening especially how he talked to me of himself, while

I, half-tired with the afternoon's lessons, reclined on the couch by the school-room window. It was twilight amongst the trees outside, and quite dusk in the room, though the fire sent out fitful glints of light now and then. Miss Bootle sat in the chimney-corner nursing her cat and dozing, as her custom was, and the curate stood at a corner of the mantel-piece, resting against it, with his face all in shadow, and his hand propping his bent head. Watch as I would, no change of feature was discernible; perhaps the dim hour made him less guarded in expression than he would have been in the brilliantly lighted drawing-room; there was such a homely quiet in the time and place that most of us might have felt tempted, if our company was congenial, to drop fantastic, conventional restraints, and let our hearts speak out.

"You wonder what is to come of my Utopian schemes, as Mrs. Brande calls them," said he in answer to a remark of mine; "perhaps they are moonshine—eighteen people in twenty would so condemn them. For what have I done?

Nothing. Which of my fine theories have I accomplished? None. You see I can sneer at them myself. Fate is to me like that great black rock out yonder to the waves at its base, which dash against it and are driven back by their own force, broken, fretted, chafing and impotent. I am like a beggar who dreams that he is a king, and wakes to squalor, and hunger, and sordid rags, and turns to sleep again that the vision may come back. One half of my life is dreams, the other regrets. When I was as young as you I imagined that energy and ability would go all lengths, but it is not so. We can go just so far as circumstances permit and no further; they guide, and check, and turn us back. You have but to live ten years longer to subscribe to the verity of this. I could pick you out a score of wise saws that are misquoted every day, which carry a specious truth on the face of them, but at the core are utterly rotten and false. I am waiting now for my lucky accident; I have but to stagnate patiently until it comes."

This was an unusual phase of the Curate's humour; he was generally ardent, enthusiastic, and full of hope. I asked if some misfortune had befallen him; he paused on the question before replying.

"Nothing recently: but old wounds have an unpleasant trick of opening now and then," was the answer when at last it came. "You must know, Kathie, that besides being a dreamer of dreams I am also a writer of books. In them I have ventured to put forward my so-called Utopian theories; but men raise an outcry against me and say, 'We will none of him! He does not speak with our tongue, or see with our eyes, or think with our thoughts. He has got into tangles and brakes where there are neither tracks nor guide-posts: we dare not, and we will not, follow him.'"

"Which, being interpreted, means that you have had no success?" said I quietly.

"Was that your voice speaking out of the gloom, Kathie? It sounded chill; mind I am not prepared to lose my little disciple."

“Speak on; her spirit is sitting at your feet now, waiting to be taught.”

“I like to believe that. I think, Kathie, you and I are something akin: it does me good to see you looking up to me out of your clear untroubled eyes. You remind me of a sister of mine who died young: she used to listen to me with a wise, reflective little face, and upturned eyes of a calm, tender, cool shade, like yours. She used to try her best to understand me, but her own nature was one of method and obedience which puzzled over my wanderings and rebellings, as I think you will never do; because, whether you will it or no, your spirit understands and responds to mine. If you were man instead of a weak little child-woman, we might stand as friends and equals: do you feel this, Kathie?”

“I would rather be what I am: I like to look up and rely. Do you put much of yourself into your books?”

“Much of my better self; not my weak unstable thoughts: those which have least of earth-soil upon them; the angel visitants.”

“Should I recognise you in them?”

“Partly. Kathie, I was born and bred in a great manufacturing town where the whole business and pleasure of existence was to get money. I dread lest the spirit of it may cling to mine: all my aspirations are not pure, all my ambitions not worthy. Sometimes I think that if I had money I might escape into liberty and fuller life. Thus far my luckless ventures have made me only poorer in purse, and no richer in reputation. Is it mean and sordid to think of these things? Look at the matter with your eyes: they must be purer than mine; for with each experience we rub off some bloom, and gather some rust.”

I was silent: this mind was beyond my gauge; he went on: “You can feel, Kathie, what a perpetually renewed thirst of soul it is to find your best efforts fall for ever short of your conception. In all my endeavours I appoint to myself an aim, yet I am only like a man drawing a bow at a venture: I have no assurance that I shall reach my mark. How often may an

individual of average courage fail before he gives up in despair?"

"You are not that individual: you will never despair."

"But, Kathie, I have despaired."

"For an hour, perhaps, or for a day."

"Be a faithful prophetess to me, little friend."

"When I have any open vision I will tell it to you."

"Kathie, there is this poor consolation for me—though I should myself accomplish nothing, I shall have pioneered the way for those who come after. Out of my chaos of rough-hewn materials some more skilful workman may erect a fair building. All great reformers and all great inventors have found much of their way prepared by the failures of their forerunners."

"All honour to those pioneers then! Let me predict for you, not the cross only, but the crown also."

"How is it, Kathie, that while even the praise and encouragement of others only depress me, you always elevate and strengthen?"

“It is because I have faith in you.”

He had changed his place from the hearth to the window; he stood near me, behind the couch, looking out at the dusk tree-shadows waving against the sky, and quite silent for a few minutes. The fire fell in with an obtrusive crash, and the blaze flamed up, filling the room with light, and throwing the grey external picture into darkness.

“I must go, my child: good night!” He stooped and left a kiss on my brow, and was gone. I was still for a little while; the flickering blaze sank, and left a pensive gloom, through which moved visions of exquisite grace and beauty, visible to me only.

Miss Bootle and Charlie roused up, and forthwith they vanished.

XV.

It was at this time that a literary lady, Miss Alicia Wilton by name, came and took lodgings

at Crofton, as it was understood for the sake of her health. Her advent made no little commotion amongst us; it was as if a hawk, intent on prey, had swooped down upon a nest of fledglings, hidden in the crevice of a rock. Whence she came was a mystery: people wondered if she were respectable, and consulted together as to whether it would be proper to call upon her. We got her books, and read them, and were dismayed. She was satirical. We saw ourselves, in anticipation, shown up to the ridicule of the general public, with all our innocent little peculiarities thick upon us. The colour of her eyes, the make of her gowns, and the shape of her bonnets, all underwent speculative discussion in the Grange drawing-room.

Grandmamma snorted her disapprobation. She wanted to know why that scribbling-woman had not pitched her tent somewhere else: she had always considered actors, literary characters, and circus people as vagabonds, and was astonished that one of the tribe should have the audacity to intrude into a quiet country neighbourhood

where she was not wanted. The outcry being thus respectably led, before Miss Wilton had been in the village a week we had denounced her as a firebrand, an incendiary, a person totally wanting in proper feminine reticence; and we laid her under the ban of our little empire at once.

Miss Bootle had the good fortune to meet her on the sands, and pronounced her an interesting person; but on the second morning after her arrival, she threw the whole of Crofton into a state of the wildest excitement. There were round matronly faces, acidulated single-blessed faces, and faces still on their promotion, peering over the blinds, all more or less expanded by a grin. The cottagers looked stealthily out past their door-posts; the young gentlemen in Doctor Martin's surgery chuckled and stared; the very postman checked his trot, and glanced back for a moment with a round-eyed surprise. The cause of this commotion was Miss Wilton; who, quite ignorant of the sensation she was causing, was riding up the town-street, mounted on a shaggy white pony belonging to the miller. She was

unattended, and appeared very much satisfied with her position, which we thought most derogatory. We wondered whither she could be going, and considered that we had gained useful information when we learnt that she had taken the bridle-road along the top of the cliffs towards the Nab. She was equipped in a style that shocked our propriety to the utmost verge of endurance. She wore a Holland skirt, a waterproof cape, a scarlet ribbon round her throat, and a broad black felt hat, from which streamed a long feather.

“After that feather,” said Miss Tedo Longstaff, one of our Crofton worthies—“after that feather the woman is capable of anything!”

The next day Miss Wilton was seen to put out to sea in a small boat with one solitary sailor, still wearing the obnoxious cape and head-gear. On other occasions she was met in remote places with a camp-stool and a sketch-book, “trudging about as independently as if the whole country belonged to her,” observed Miss Tedo.

In vain we all marvelled at her ignorance

of the observances of society, and raved to see her so easy and happy in spite of our bad opinion.

“I shall put an end to this!” gasped my grandmother one afternoon, when the stranger outraged all our feelings by walking up the village in the rain without umbrella, her gown being tucked up and exhibiting a pair of strong, laced boots and brown stockings. Miss Bootle also thought Miss Wilton’s friends, if she had any, ought to be informed of her proceedings without delay. Accordingly, the next day my grandmother went to call upon her, but not finding her at home, deposited a card, and promised another visit.

Our judgment was rather shaken on the morrow, however, by the poor lady’s appearance at church. She wore a bonnet of the orthodox shape, and a very pretty dress: all which we saw distinctly, because she came in when the first hymn was being sung, and we were standing up. She was young, and rather plain, but quite inoffensive looking; and I believe most of us were

disappointed, having prepared ourselves to see a large, bony, high-featured person, outrageously attired, and flying in the face of all propriety by her general appearance. A council was held as we walked homewards after church, during which Miss Tedo started the idea that this stranger might probably be all the more dangerous, insomuch that she did not wear any insignia of her calling: she must be a wolf in sheep's clothing intent on effecting an entry into the fold, and we must be on our guard against her insidious wiles. Grandmamma demurred to this: she thought Miss Wilton's countenance attractive; and having begun to contradict, from being her most severe depreciator, my kinswoman became her fiercest partisan; and the opinions Mrs. Brande promulgated, Crofton received as articles of faith. On the Monday, Crofton left its card at Miss Wilton's door unanimously, and my grandmother was admitted to an interval, from which she came home converted to admiration of the stranger.

“She is a sensible woman, who is above

truckling to the absurd usages of the world," we were informed. "She will be an acquisition to our society; I shall make a party for her and ask her here."

Every invitation to meet the extinct firebrand was eagerly accepted, and when she appeared amongst us there was almost a strife as to who should be most flattering and cordial; though we did think her plain black net frock and braided hair rather disrespectful, where everybody else was in their best attire: but we could allow her a few eccentricities by virtue of her book-writing.

Once introduced she rose suddenly into fashion, and if she had chosen to scour the country mounted on Doctor Martin's blue cow nobody would have wagged a tongue against it. Her favourite attitude was standing with her back to the fire and her hands behind her, like a gentleman; Miss Bootle said it showed her intellect and strength of mind. She did not talk much, but had a little grave manner which might have passed for simplicity, had not her

sleepy eyes brightened up now and then into a wicked and mischievous vivacity. Miss Tedo Longstaff said she believed those eyes saw more than they seemed to see, for they made her skin tingle if they glanced at her when their owner was being discussed, and she would warrant her for detecting people's real characters under the thickest and most specious veils, sooner than any professed craniologist or physiognomist in the three kingdoms.

Soon after her reception amongst us a book of hers was announced, and everybody posted off to the Loughboro Library to get it the first. Miss Tedo Longstaff was the successful person, and after she had run through the first volume, she came over in hot haste to the Grange to *unmask* it, as she stated. She had never liked Miss Wilton, and this was what we got by admitting professional writers within our doors. She bade us observe how markedly Crofton was satirized under the guise of a large provincial town, and then proceeded to distribute the characters amongst us, as if it were Twelfth

Night; they suited us about as well as those charity garments which are all made of one size, and then fitted at random upon divers shapes of bodies. I was not much flattered at the portrait indicated by Miss Tedo as mine: it was a little, impish, deformed child, who made no end of mischief for everybody connected with her; neither was my grandmother, who, our enlightener insisted, was caricatured under the figure of a blunt, harsh-voiced market-woman. I dare not say how many people showed themselves aggrieved when it was pointed out to them that they ought to be so, to whom it would never have occurred but for Miss Tedo's suggestions. She even wanted to mention these cruel personalities to Miss Wilton, but she was prevailed on to forbear, lest that treacherous person should feel flattered and gratified at the success of our portraiture.

After we had wasted a great deal of excellent resentment, and delivered our labouring bosoms of the severity of our indignation to each other in private, we one day made the discovery, by

reference to the title page, that the obnoxious work was passing through a third edition, and that therefore it must have been written and printed long before Miss Wilton invaded our domestic peace.

“Ah, well!” cried Miss Tedo much chagrined; “if she has not taken us off in this book she will in the next, you may depend upon it. I dare say these are the last people that she lived amongst on familiar terms. I won’t trust her.”

I believe at that juncture, if anybody had been public spirited enough to propose such a step, we should have bribed Miss Wilton to go away, and leave us undistinguished by her satirical pen; but we were half afraid of her. It was very distressing, if we tried to take an observation of her in the course of an innocent tea-drinking, to find her eyes either quite dark or else rolling back a shrewd scrutiny upon ourselves; and if Miss Tedo, as she ventured to do sometimes, complimented her sarcastically on her successful likenesses, to hear her ask, with the most indifferent and unconscious air in

the world, "Do they remind you of any of your acquaintance? I am glad if they do, for I always try to be true to nature." As if she understood Miss Tedo to mean a good general likeness to a class, or some individual portraiture at unity with itself throughout.

XVI.

It was now about midway in September, still warm as with the remembrance of summer past when the air was unstirred, but with a chill breath in the breezes that lifted the foliage at unsheltered corners of the shrubbery and garden walks. I was now permitted to walk there daily for an hour, and daily my strength grew, and a faint bloom dawned upon my cheek, until its worn, haggard hollowness rounded to the outline of youth and health. One morning about this time, I received a long letter from my mother, which I carried out into the garden to read a second and a third time through. She wanted me at home,

and I was desirous to go, but felt, nevertheless, that there was much at Crofton that it would pain me to leave. Grandmamma wished me to stay until the cold season began, and then to return to Eversley for the winter: my aunt Aurelia was coming to visit her mother, and it was advisable that I should make her acquaintance. All the reasons why I should remain at Crofton awhile longer seemed to me very good, and those for my return home quite insufficient. Dr. Martin was of opinion that I was just in that state of health to profit by the pure, bracing sea air, and I agreed with him entirely: but through all I had a consciousness that a wholly personal and selfish motive was secretly actuating me; and after a third perusal I put my letter away, and determined to let others decide for me.

It was a quiet morning; the sky was misty blue: grey over the sea, not with defined clouds, but as if a floating, vaporous haze were creeping stealthily up from the horizon to the low-lying shore. The air, balmy and genial, was filled

with pleasant and musical sounds. Twitterings of birds, the silvery rush of wings from bough to bough, the breaking of the waves upon the sand, the rising murmurs of wind, the fluttering downwards of drifts of withered foliage, and the crisp rustle of dead leaves upon the path. My youthful fancy kept me company as I paced to and fro; we weaved fresh tinted buds into our garland of hope, and went on thinking, thinking, thinking, mistily and extravagantly as the heart of seventeen will think, let grave Experience and sober Reason twit it as they will.

Standing to gaze through an opening between the trees at the sea, I said to myself—"If I had been born in these solitudes—if, instead of that glorious old Minster, and that dim west parlour, and the window on the stairs, I had had the sea and the wild moorland hills, up yonder, for my study and my dream-land, should I have had my haunting mystical fancies? I should have loved this silence; it breathes vigour and freshness. My mother was moorland-bred; is it from her I inherit this yearning after nature in her

remotest haunts? My heart glows as if a stream akin to it were flowing through its arteries; its musical pulses thrill harmonious to all these notes of earth, and air, and sea. But the old Gothic city is dearer. I would not change its mute teaching; it is part of me: my familiar, my haunting genius. Its grey shadow lies on me softly; its memories, its traditions are mine, inwrought with the web of my mind."

Returning slowly under the shelter of the trees, I fell into another mood. I was sensible of a mournful strain in my feelings; whence it came I knew not, nor whither it tended: it had the dim, prophetic outline of distant cloud—cloud which is not storm, but may be. I paused, and stirring the dead leaves on the pathway with my foot, said half aloud, "Courage, faint heart! shall we not take pleasure in the wealth of nature because of these scatterlings of untimely decay? It is idle to lament over one broken branch while whole forests stand in their green beauty, and the blue sky over all. No dews can put life again into these sapless leaves; there they must

lie, there they must rot, till their dust mix with mother-earth, and a fair flower, perhaps, spring from their decay."

My grave thoughts were at this point summarily put to flight by the sudden apparition of Charlie tumbled out of the drawing-room window, followed by the most exquisite little snow-drop of a white kitten that was ever seen. Grand-mamma had done it; and her face, looking dreadfully irate, remained at the glass watching the frolics of the pair upon the sunny lawn. In about two minutes Miss Bootle came trembling forth, and tried to coax her pet to take refuge in her apron; but Charlie had acquired a shameful independence of character, and utterly refused to do it. There was dolour in the old lady's every feature as she advanced to me and said with a pensive air, "You see how it is, my dear. I did not tell you when you were ill because I knew you would be hurt and disappointed as I was, but this is the third time Charlie has taken on himself the cares of maternity. I gave half-a-crown for him as a little king-cat, and it was a shameful

imposition. I do hate to be taken in, don't you? Imagine then what a shock it was when I discovered him in my wardrobe with two wee, blind, chintzy kittens. Sharpe drowned them, and she did it the second time too; but I contrived to keep that sweet pet secret until this morning, when she found it out, and told Mrs. Brande."

"It was very ill-natured, I'm sure!"

"It was, my dear, but perhaps your grand-mamma might have forgotten it if I had not been such a silly old goose. I have been practising ever so long calling Charlie Dinah, and trying to accustom myself to the use of the feminine pronoun; and when I was reading I am afraid I introduced the name, for Mrs. Brande asked what I meant with 'my Dinahs,' and then, remembering the kitten, she snatched at my apron, and discovered the innocent pet asleep in my lap with its mother. You saw her throw them out of the window: I could have cried. And the worst of all is that Sharpe has been ordered to drown it, and I know she is lying in wait to do it."

"Could we not propitiate her?"

"As well try to propitiate Charlie himself where a mouse is concerned."

"Then let us give it away."

"But it is not weaned; and besides, who would have it?"

"I have a thought! Give it to Mr. Mayne!"

"His Hannah would be kind to it:—well, my dear, we will walk up to the cottage with it to-morrow morning, and in the meantime, we must keep it in safe hiding. Poor Charlie will break his heart: it is such a winsome wee thing."

I always had a great delight in circumventing the gorgon, Sharpe, so I undertook to hide the little kitten, and after casting about in my own mind for an eligible place of concealment, fixed finally on that grim waiting-woman's best bonnet-box as the least suspicious locality; for it stood in the great wardrobe on the top landing, where grandmamma's state apparel was kept, and which was never opened except on Sundays and festal days. The bonnet I hid in a trash closet until

the following morning, and though both Sharpe and poor Charlie wearied themselves in their researches after the missing kitten, neither succeeded in discovering it.

Immediately after luncheon the next day, Miss Bootle and I received a dispensation to walk up to the Curate's cottage; and having made all look straight and unsuspecting, we abstracted the tiny animal from his concealment, and started to carry our present to Mr. Mayne. He was not at home; but his housekeeper, Hannah, received us hospitably, and promised maternal cares to Charlie's offspring. Miss Bootle wept at resigning him, but was comforted at seeing him lap cream, hopelessly entangle Hannah's knitting, and then go to sleep upon it.

"I shall call him 'the Dean,'" said the housekeeper; "my last cat was auld Dean. It is professional, and I do hope to see my master a dean, ay, maybe a bishop, before I die."

We acquiesced in the irreverent title and the reason for its adoption, and then inquired where Mr. Mayne was.

“He has gone across the moor to Loughboro, and I suppose he’ll come back by your place; this is a scattered parish for a gentleman who always travels on Shanks’ nag. You’ll have heard that our Rector and his family are coming next week, and then he’ll not have so much to do: the old gentleman must take some hand in the parish surely.”

Miss Bootle had heard of the projected arrival of the Pompes; she hoped the Curate’s work would be lightened thereby, but did not anticipate such a result.

“I thought I knew every face about Crofton, but I don’t know yours, miss,” said Hannah with an earnest look at me: “you won’t be Mrs. Brande’s sick grandchild that I have heard master speak of so oft?”

“Yes, I am.”

“Why I thought you were only a lile bairn, and you are almost a lady! If I had thought of you coming, miss, I ’d have had all redd up and tidy.”

Everything was in neatest order, and so we

said; but the housekeeper continued to express regrets till Miss Bootle turned her thoughts into another channel, and one in which she was particularly fluent—namely, her master.

“He’s a grand man!” she averred; “a grand man, with a power of book learning, and a real, kind, Christian heart. If you knew him as well as I do you’d say nothing is too big or too little for him. I’ve seen him lift a poor worm off the garden walk in the dust, for fear he’d tread on it when it got too dark to see it as he went up and down. There isn’t a thing that doesn’t love him, from the childer at the school to the birds he feeds at his window every morning. That little cat you’ve brought will take to him better nor ever it will to me: it’s a way he has; I don’t pretend to understand it, but so it is.”

“You are proud of him, Hannah,” Miss Bootle said.

“Ay, ma’am, and a good right too. I know’n’t his equal! I nursed him in these arms, and a real noble bairn he was; though he had a temper. You may get glints of it at whiles now

when anything puts him up: he's no lamb isn't Master Felix. A strange name, Felix, miss; but his mother said it meant *happy*, and it would maybe be like a blessing to him: I don't know. She was wrapped up in that lad, and he was a good son to her; ay, if he had been as high and mighty as 'Get out!' with me five minutes afore, he'd slip off his shoes to go up to her room, and speak as soft, ay, as soft as a doo!"

"And she is dead?"

"Yes, miss; she died a matter of six years since, soon after Ellen—that was master's sister: there was only two of them. He was a sore care to his mother, was Master Felix, though he loved her dearly. He was a troublesome tyke as ever lived in a house. Rest! bless you, he couldn't do it; and oft-times I'm tempted to think he can't yet, though he's better now nor ever he was. Still if there is a danger he must mell' on it and be first in it. You'll mind of that awful wreck last January, Miss Bootle—what call had he to be there? I tell him it will be a strange thing if *he* dies in his bed. He ought to have been a

soldier, and then he'd have gotten plague enough without going out of his way to seek it."

Though Hannah spoke in a tone of complaint, it was easy to see that what she imputed to her master as faults were virtues in her eyes. Perhaps there were others there of the same way of thinking.

The first time we saw Mr. Mayne after our visit to his cottage, he acknowledged the gift of the kitten (he said "the Dean,") with complacency. Grandmamma being present, asked him if "that silly Bootle" had infected him with her mania for pet cats.

"I do not see why ordinary people should undertake to despise cats," replied he with imperturbable gravity: "Montaigne had a cat, and played with it, or it with him. Robinson Crusoe had a cat; Dr. Johnson had a series of cats, and studied their qualities with the discriminating eye of a philosopher. You remember Hodge, madam, alluded to in Mr. Boswell's life of the Doctor?"

"No." Grandmamma could not burthen her

memory with any such rubbish. Miss Bootle, however, recollected the passage, and was of opinion that it was one of the most amiable traits in the great man's character; she had been touched even to tears when first she met with it.

"Let us have the book if it is entertaining, and read it instead of that dense old ecclesiastical history," said grandmamma.

The proposal was received with favour, and the morning readings became quite attractive to me. I think Mr. Boswell's Life of his friend one of the best biographies that were ever written, and turn to it always with undiminished pleasure and satisfaction.

There we have the very man as he lived, moved, spoke, and thought. I like him better every time I read it. His extreme sufferings and poverty are painful: I like that touch of character recorded of him at college, where he was so ill-shod that he was obliged to keep his room, yet too proud and independent to accept the new shoes which some charitable soul secretly placed outside his door. This was the same pride that

later on, when his own unaided energy had earned him success, rejected the tardy patronage of that courtly dissembler, Chesterfield. To think that this man was sometimes in want of a dinner! I wished I could have given him one every day!

And perhaps there are men of powers as great, going through the same stern discipline of work and want to-day! who knows? Nobody meeting that gaunt, unattractive figure, and gloomy countenance, in London streets, could say that he would soon become one of the most noted men of his time. There is a lesson in his life of more worth than all his philosophic teachings. The poor hypochondriac, cursed with hereditary disease, exposed to the contumely of the great and the ridicule of the little, patiently working, fasting, and waiting, upheld by his own strong heart, until his appointed hour comes with its guerdon of honour, success, and fame—not, let us hope, as he says in that bitter letter, “till he was indifferent and could not enjoy it; till he was solitary and could not impart it; till he was known and did not want it.”

There is something inexpressibly sad in reading of the sorrows of such a man, though we know that they are ended, for they suggest parallel cases in this present time. Perhaps no man was ever the worse poet for going through harsh experiences: Crabbe might not have written so well but for his hungry probation; and surely Goldsmith could not either. I wonder what Otway thought of life, and poor Chatterton? It was something like gnashing their teeth on stones I suspect, and instances might be multiplied up to yesterday; but let them pass—this digression is already too long, seeing it has arisen out of the destiny of a kitten.

XVII.

During the last week of September, my aunt Aurelia arrived at Crofton, as also did the Rectory family: consisting of Dr. Pompe; the honourable lady, his wife; Milicent, their daughter; and Reginald, their son. From that time forward

the peaceful economy of my grandmother's house underwent a thorough reform: the dinner hour was changed from two to half-past six, a constant influx of visitors inundated the little drawing-room, and there was an incessant running to and fro between the Rectory and the Grange, as our house was called. Miss Bootle and I were permitted to exile ourselves to the school-room as much as we chose, and there the lessons went on as usual; Mr. Mayne coming and going at stated hours.

There were three or four families of gentlefolks in Crofton, from amongst whom it was easy to make up small, early parties, and whenever Mrs. Marston was not at the Rectory, or at one or other of these people's houses, there was always company at home. On these occasions the companion and I appeared in the drawing-room, where I always had a seat near the fire, and away from the draughts of doors. It was understood that I was a girl of delicate health, neglected education, and no character; so people did not supplicate me to take my turn at the piano,

neither did they ever make a remark to me that was not as old and as respectable as the hills.

I was ineffably wearied, of course, and deemed these entertainments lesser purgatories, where I expiated my sin of false appearances; being now in perfect health, and, though the theory had failed, much less stupid than my friends and relatives supposed. Sitting in my corner I watched the incipient flirtations, and heard scraps of the inane talk that went on about me; inwardly envious of the companion, who fussed about the rooms and seemed acceptable to everybody. It was pleasanter for me when the Curate was there, for then I was sure of a few minutes' conversation once or twice during the weary evening; indeed, the mere fact of his presence would have been enough without so much as a word. But when he did not come, it was very tedious: I had only to answer the everlasting question about my health and my morning's walk, to listen to the same songs, and respond gratefully to the same mild advice, tendered by the same amiable old ladies, as I had heard ten times before.

Previous to my aunt Aurelia's arrival, I had ventured to indulge in some day-dreams concerning her, which fell collapsed, as day-dreams mostly do, at the touch of reality. She was the faded remains of a once beautiful woman, but the expression of her face was that of utter weariness, almost of discontent. Her manner was at once proud and kind, careless and capricious: still young—thirty-three at the utmost—she had the worn and jaded look of a woman nearly twice her age; every exertion seemed a fatigue to her, and every pleasure a burthen. I had much difficulty in understanding her character at first: afterwards it came to my knowledge that she had been early urged into a marriage of interest which had turned out miserably; and being left a childless and wealthy widow at twenty-four, with certain restrictions on her property which prevented her from marrying again, she had indemnified herself for the clog on her liberty by leading since a gay and frivolous life. When I was introduced to her as her niece, she perused my features for an instant, observed that I was not like my father,

gave me a limp shake of the hand, accompanied by a cold kiss, and forthwith seemed to forget my existence in the house. I was recalled to her memory, not by my own merits, but in the following manner:—coming into the school-room one evening at five o'clock to seek Miss Bootle, who officiated as her maid, she found Mr. Mayne there giving me a lesson.

“I was not aware that you acted as private tutor to my niece, Mr. Mayne,” said she; “pray do not let me interrupt;” for he rose to go, we having just come to an end of our day’s work. I said so; and as the Curate had an engagement, he immediately took leave, and went away.

“How long has Kathie had Mr. Mayne for her teacher?” my aunt asked of grandmamma, who entered at the moment.

“I cannot exactly say: ever since she was well enough to learn.”

“And what do you pay him?” was the next question.

“I am sure Mr. Mayne will never take

any money for teaching me!" cried I hastily.

"And, pray, why not, Kathie?" retorted grandmamma.

I felt why, but did not choose to say, and blushed instead.

Aunt Aurelia answered for me.

"Because he works for love!" cried she with a displeasing laugh; then added, as if she had just made an interesting discovery, "Kathie is not so very ugly, mother, after all: her eyes are lovely, and when she colours she is almost pretty; but you dress her like a nun. I shall take her in hand myself, and try to make her rather more presentable."

I felt foolish and confused at having been betrayed into the hasty assertion respecting Mr. Mayne, but I am free to confess that my aunt Aurelia's outspoken criticism did not displease me. So accustomed had I been to consider myself as a very plain girl, and so shyly and painfully conscious had I often felt of my personal deficiencies, that I experienced almost

a sensation of gratitude towards her for setting me more at ease with myself. It was enough that I was not so palpably and obtrusively plain as to provoke comment; perfectly insignificant I was content to be, but not displeasing or repulsive.

My aunt's threat that she would take me in hand herself she began to put into execution on the very next morning. She had Sharpe and the village milliner set to work on a new white muslin dress; and she herself, with Miss Bootle for her aider and abettor, made a lay figure of me during two hours for the purpose of distorting my hair into every conceivable hideous fashion. My hair was my one beauty—as soft and glossy as silk, and so long as nearly to reach my knee; nothing would have induced me to part with it, and when Sharpe proposed to have it cut, so that I might wear the fashionable crop of short curls, I flung away from my tormentors, and defied them to touch it. I was not to be shorn of my glory, which—which somebody had admired, for all the waiting-women in Christendom!

"She is as proud of her locks as Absalom," said my aunt laughing.

"Because she has nothing else to be proud of," was the discomfited Sharpe's vindictive reply.

It would be difficult to say how many times I was given up to that person's lugubrious attentions and froggy hands before the white dress was accomplished to my aunt's satisfaction; but at last it was finished, and I was attired therein to go to a great party at the Rectory. The much-cavilled-at hair was dressed after my ordinary manner—braided from my face, and twisted into a wreath of plaits low in the neck behind: I copied it originally from an old print, but it was so unlike other people's that nobody would acknowledge that it had any other merit than that of being always tidy.

"The dress is very suitable; the child really looks pretty well," was grandmamma's comment, to which Miss Bootle warmly assented.

"Yes," responded my aunt. "Kathie, let me fasten this cluster of rose-buds into the bosom

of your dress; they are almost the last in the garden: the crimson and green relieve the whiteness. Now look at yourself in the glass."

She drew me to the long mirror, wherein I saw reflected a slender shape, draped in soft, snowy muslin, which I should not have recognised as my own but for the internal assurance of my personality.

"I should not be ashamed of my niece anywhere," said my aunt. "I wish she were going to live with me, and I would bring her out properly."

"Aurelia, I am surprised at you!" cried grand-mamma severely; "how can you talk such ineffable trash? It is quite wrong to put ideas into the child's head when in a month or two she must don her plain stuff gown, and work as hard, or harder, than our village schoolmistress. Do you know what depends upon her, that you speak so inconsiderately?"

"Oh yes, mother! and it is a great pity and a great sacrifice, that is all."

"Pshaw, Kathie! do not listen to your aunt's

nonsense: she will spoil you. Make up your little mind to a quiet respectable life, and do not care for admiration and frivolity, because they are quite out of your way. Come, Aurelia! you promised to be at the Rectory early, and it is nearly nine o'clock: make haste!"

XVIII.

My grandmother's allusion to the work-day life that awaited me did not take off the edge from present enjoyment. I was young, happy, and desirous of finding favour in somebody's sight, and this, with the innocent girlish consciousness that I was looking my best, and rather nice than otherwise, gave a more than usual bloom to my cheek, and to my eyes a not unpleasing lustre. Besides, this was my first party, which is always an exciting era in a girl's life. I had my little vanities then, and do not choose to ignore them now; if I could have decked myself with angel-beauty I would have done it, but only that in one

person's sight I might look fair: had all the rest of the world been blind, his approving eyes would have sufficed me. Some people may regard this confession of mine as weak, others may denounce it as unfeminine; I offer no plea in extenuation: thus it was; mine is no model character, but one full of errors and mistakes. As yet I was only earning my experience, and could not be wise before my time. True it is, that an instinctive pride kept my childish love hidden; but secret though it was, it was strong and real—the strongest and most real thing in the whole world to me: I might conceal it from others, but I could no longer deny it to myself.

My aunt and I were amongst the earliest guests to arrive at the Rectory, and Milicent Pompe led us into a pretty little inner boudoir which opened to the brilliantly lighted conservatory; nobody else was there, so, making my aunt sit down, the young lady knelt on the hearthrug before her, and with her round white arms resting in her lap, entered into a low-toned conversation.

“Why do I so rarely see you now, Mrs.

Marston?" she said in a complaining voice: "you have another companion, and don't miss me."

"My dearest Milicent, what would you have? We meet almost daily."

"I want you to go to the Charltons: mamma has accepted their invitation for three days, and I shall expire of weariness if you stay away. That everlasting embroidery, and mediæval conversation, stifle me: promise me that you will go."

"But I cannot leave my mother so soon; besides you will have plenty of gaieties, and will never feel my absence."

"Gaieties! Perhaps we shall have a carpet dance, when the dust will make us all sneeze penitentially; do you call that gaieties?"

"I am sorry to disappoint you, Milicent: I really cannot go."

"You *will* not." She pouted like a thwarted child for a minute or two, then brightening again asked confidentially, "What do you think of papa's curate, Felix Mayne? I have been longing

to know, but it seems as if I never could have you to myself now."

"My dear, I am scarcely acquainted with him; but he is a favourite with my mother, so he must be something superior."

"I like him: he has so much genius, and he is so ambitious and proud. Papa says that he means well, but for any purpose of practical mundane utility he might just as well be revolving in infinite space, a star of the first magnitude."

My tongue burned to protest against this, but I contrived to hold my peace; and presently, on the entrance of a party of people to me unknown, Milicent Pompe and my aunt left the boudoir, and mixed with the other visitors.

My ordinary fate then overtook me; and soon I found myself established on a couch between two elderly dowagers, who squabbled over my head about "odd trick," whatever that might be. I resigned myself to a total eclipse with fortitude, and perhaps relief. It was not in me to glide about the room, making myself universally

agreeable, as I saw Milicent Pompe and other girls doing: my strength was to sit still.

Mr. Mayne had been present some time before I descried him in the first room, the centre of a group of ladies, all talking together, while he listened, or seemed to listen, with a grave sarcastic attention. It has not been said before, and may therefore as well be said now, that this gentleman was universally admired by our sex, who looked up to him almost as a god amongst men: from the Rector's pompous lady to his little pupil in the Grange school-room, there was not one dissenting opinion. By mere force of intellect he influenced most people; he was infinitely greater and better than anybody else, so we set him up on a pedestal, as it were, and worshipped: that was my sentiment, at least, and it was not unshared. It often gave me a cruel pain to see how women fluttered about him: I fancy it was the same jealousy of passion that quivers in the heart of a poor animal when she is tethered and sees a strange hand fondling her young; she dreads that they may be taken from her. I knew

he liked me; I had hived up many tokens of that, but I wanted him to like me *only*: I wanted to be the sole worshipper at the shrine. It pained me now to see him follow Milicent Pompe to the piano, and turn over the leaves of her song. Milicent was a beautiful woman—I could see that—very beautiful: not *lovely*, because of a certain shade of coarseness in expression that time would further develope; but brilliant and striking, with a clear vivid complexion, great eyes, and floods of deep bronzed red hair. Her figure was tall and large, her neck gracefully and haughtily curved, and her arms pretty, but spoiled by a broad, thick, pulpy hand. Grandmamma said her age was twenty-six; if so, she had preserved unfaded her youthful freshness. She had a fine voice, and sang in a free, natural, careless way, which was exceedingly pleasant to hear. Many people said she was the handsomest and most accomplished woman they knew: I heard it in grandmamma's drawing-room daily; Aunt Aurelia, whose friend she was, insisted on it with earnestness; Miss Wilton added her

word of praise—a word of weight at Crofton now.



Before Milicent's song was finished, one of the dowagers had vacated her seat, and left my view more open. I could see all the group at the piano: Mr. Longstaff, from the White House, Miss Theodosia, his maiden sister, Miss Wilton, and old Miss Conolly, stood on the further side; the three Miss Froudes, in blue crape, with entwined arms, hovered restlessly by; and Mr. Mayne, with young Reginald Pompe, and a black bearded stranger, hung uncomfortably in the rear; a pale, fair-haired, little lady in pink, the dark individual's wife, was close behind Milicent, with her hands clasped on her shoulders. While I observed them they began to sing a duet together, and Mr. Longstaff, smitten with admiration for the tune perhaps, growled out at intervals a not very tuneful bass. Miss Conolly and his sister seemed to me to incite him to the performance, and afterwards to compliment him upon it—very unnecessarily.

When elderly people will sing in society, it is

always a matter of regret to me that they have ever had voices—they are so reluctant to forget their ancient triumphs ; even Miss Conolly quavered through the refrain of that beautiful song, which for thirty years back, at least, she ought not to have attempted.

Mr. Mayne did not appear to be listening: there was a sort of far-away abstraction in his eyes, downcast on the carpet, and a set, cold expression about his lips which gave a sternness to his countenance. Aunt Aurelia went and spoke to him, and he started like a man breaking away from an unfinished dream. Milicent Pompe laughed, and made some rallying speech, for he appeared to be excusing himself, and then turned again to Mrs. Marston. Though I could not hear a word where I sat, I knew by the movement of his lips that he was asking after grandmamma, and then that he added, “And how is Kathie to-day?” for my aunt looked towards the boudoir and said, “She is here; I left her on the couch by the conservatory door:” that I did hear; and immediately Mr. Mayne crossed the drawing-

room, and came through the folding doors straight to where I sat. He seemed very glad, and made a low-toned observation on my propensity for hiding myself in out-of-the-way corners, as he took a seat near me. The other velvet dowager presently sailed away; and though we had not much to say to each other, the contented expression that came over his face made me happy for all the night. I liked so much to feel that my being there was pleasant to him, and that he would come to me even when there were so many gayer and cleverer people to talk to. If he had not found me, or if, having found me, he had left me again directly, I should have gone home miserable, and perhaps have cried myself asleep. I always thought his manner to me kinder than to other women: though he was courteous to all, for me his voice had a gentler and yet freer tone, as if he were more at home with me than with them. He once even expressed this when he came from the Rectory to give me my lesson: he said, "Kathie, I feel as if I were coming to my own fireside." And on this evening

there was a peculiar kindness in his tone, and an eager softness, very different to the conventional attentions and respect I had seen him distribute amongst the Misses Froude. I could not help saying to myself, "I am sure he likes me," with a sort of reckless exultation: I did not stop to count the cost of my triumph, then or ever.

Not six sentences had we exchanged when Mr. Longstaff, a long, thin, fossilized gentleman, entered the boudoir, and came forward to talk to Mr. Mayne about some geological discoveries of recent date. Then in glided Miss Conolly, who must have been very old; yet she was still serving the world, and bowing heart and soul to it, though her head was white and her lank jaw toothless: still making it many offerings of cramps and pains glossed over with, alas! smiles no longer — spasmodic grins rather; reminding one of the grin mortality wears when the flesh has rotted from the skull, and left it bare, open-mouthed, mocking as it were at its very loathsomeness—from which lips wherein life is would shrink away shuddering. It offended

my sense of the fitness of things to see decrepit age masquerading in the garb of youth; looking as grimly fantastic as a death's head crowned with May roses. She had a harassed expression of eye through all her smirking, which caused me to suspect that, intent as she seemed on Mr. Longstaff's geological conversation, she was aware that her auburn front had been accidentally pushed awry, and that she was watching her opportunity to set it straight. He, poor stony man, seemed quite impervious to her fascinations, looking straight into the opposite wall, and talking like a scientific report. When a pause occurred, she complimented him on his memory, and then, turning to me, asked in a stage whisper if I did not think him a very spiritual person. The queer, shrewd smile that slanted across his hard face boded ill for his susceptibility to elegant figures of speech.

Mr. Longstaff was a frequent visitor at my grandmother's house, and he had distinguished me by a good deal of kindness as towards a child: sending me fruit and flowers often while

I was ill, and since my recovery even inviting me to the White House to inspect his geological specimens—a mark of favour which his sister told me he had never extended to one of my sex before. He wearied me certainly; but I generally contrived to keep up my attention, because he was such an excellent and amiable person, and so tolerant of my ignorance, which everybody was not. Now, however, he was unpardonably tedious: it seemed as if he would never cease his long-winded dissertation on a fossilized bee's-wing, or something of that kind. He fairly talked Miss Conolly off her feet, and she retired to an ottoman near the door-way where she could see without hearing. Mr. Mayne supported it a little longer; but hearing his own name in the other room, he gladly beat a retreat, and Mr. Longstaff dropped into his seat as if he had been waiting for it. I groaned internally, knowing but too well his capability of holding forth on his favourite hobby for hours together; but many bunches of grapes, many posies of Russian violets, with “Mr.

Longstaff's compliments and desires to know how Miss Kathie is to day?" weighed me down like lead to my couch-corner. It was never my failing to forget or be ungrateful for kindness, and I thought this gave him a large claim on my endurance, so I listened patiently.

He was not an abrupt person, but it will always be a marvel to me how, in less than five minutes after we were left by ourselves, he, without startling me, glided out of the valley of dry bones into offering me his hand "with his heart in it," and the position of mistress of the White House. His face never changed a muscle, his eyes never swerved from the wall: Miss Conolly from her post of observation on the ottoman could not have conjectured how her schemes were being perilled; he might have been alluding to some new specimen that he was going to put into a glass case. I had no inclination to laugh, though it was ridiculous; nor to cry, though it was disagreeable; least of all to feel confused: so I declined the honour—indeed, such it was—plainly and positively, in

half a dozen words or less; during which, and following which, there was no physiognomical change whatever in Mr. Longstaff's face, except that his eyes left the wall and sought the carpet. He was silent for the space of perhaps thirty seconds; then he asked in the same tone if he must really abandon hope, and if I was pre-attached. At this blunt question, the colour flushed warm in my face; then I turned very white: probably he felt that he had no right to make this demand almost as soon as it was uttered, for, finding that I made no reply, he added rather hastily, "I crave your pardon, Miss Kathie," (he was an old fashioned man, and used odd words) "let us remain friends: there is no offence." I was so young as to feel re-assured at hearing this, and if he had chosen to take another turn into the world before the flood, I should have followed without diffidence, looking on it in the light of compensation; but he did not: he went to the card-table, and took a hand at whist instead.

My casual views of society as it existed at

Crofton, were not very enlivening, but it must be borne in mind that I was a spectator rather than an actor therein. People appeared to come together in their best clothes, and to conspire to be ceremoniously and respectably dull. Certain elderly ladies and gentlemen sat down to cards; the younger people clustered round the piano, and if they played or sang, repeated their pieces and ballads as if they were an institution not to be foregone; diffident individuals entrenched themselves behind picture-books, and looked at them perseveringly throughout whole evenings; rarely opening their mouths except to stave off any approach to intimacy. Mr. Mayne, Mr. Longstaff, and young Reginald Pompe, were the only unmarried men in the community, while the young ladies were in the majority of six to one; thus a flirtation could only be got up under difficulties, unless some lucky accident drifted an eligible stranger into the village; for Mr. Mayne divided his courtesies impartially, Mr. Longstaff was as hard and unimpressible generally as one of his own pre-Adamite relics, and Reginald Pompe

was too deeply in love with his own handsome face and person to be otherwise than conceited and stupid. The Froudes, whose education had been finished in Paris, made a few spasmodic efforts to introduce games and dancing amongst the evening-party givers; but they had been speedily snubbed into propriety, and ended by becoming as dull, stagnant, and insipid, as the oldest and most respectable inhabitants of the township.

The present meeting formed no exception to the rule: there was the usual amount of polite wrangling amongst the card-playing seniors; Miss Conolly sung her song, "Had I a heart for falsehood framed," and was duly complimented and laughed at; Milicent Pompe gave "Where the bee sucks," and took part in several duets, with great applause; and a young girl from school thundered through the newly imported "Battle of Prague," which I thought a fine piece then, and do still. Everybody appraised everybody else's attire; there was the proper amount of talk, never rising above personal or parish gossip; and at half-past

twelve everybody, as with one consent, rose up to go.

It chanced that in the dispersion of the company Miss Conolly, my aunt Aurelia, and I, were left the last; and Mrs. Pompe arrested us just as we were on the point of departing, to make, as she stated, a communication of importance. To me she hastily presented an album of portraits of celebrated characters, as a hint that little girls were not desired to listen; so I discreetly seated myself at the round table, though not out of ear-shot, for they spoke aloud.

The Rector's lady always had a pet grievance on hand for the delectation of her friends; the present one which she wished to impart to Mrs. Marston concerned the curate at Dr. Pompe's living in Hampshire. It appeared that this gentleman was about to commit the indiscretion of marrying, and that, finding his stipend of 30*l.*, even with the addition of a furnished cottage, insufficient for the maintenance of himself and wife, he proposed to resign his curacy, and turn schoolmaster. Miss Conolly, who had a nephew

waiting for a title for holy orders, animadverted on such foolish and monstrous ingratitude; and Mrs. Pompe dismissed the presumptuous curate with valedictory remarks, and an incomprehensible quotation touching the sinfulness of Satan and ambition.

“I should like Mr. Mayne to exchange his curacy here for Broughton,” said she in continuation: “Broughton is a very populous parish, and he is such a trustworthy person. He would always have suited that place better than Crofton.”

“Oh, mamma, we never go down to Broughton now!” interrupted Milicent: “I see no reason whatever for Mr. Mayne’s exchanging.”

“That partiality of yours is a weakness that I do not approve, my dear; pray conquer it,” said her mother shortly; “it has nothing to do with the present question, and I am surprised that you should intrude it. It is most mortifying to your father and me.”

“Very well, mamma, then say no more about it: if Mr. Mayne goes, Crofton society will have lost its best member.”

“We are only among intimate friends, Milicent, or I should be ashamed of you. I wonder a girl of your position and talents should be so absurd as to think for a moment of Mr. Mayne, who has nothing besides his curacy: it is most unworthy.”

Milicent turned sharply round, and walked away; I heard her muttering fiercely to herself as she passed behind me.

“I do not know what the world is coming to,” said the Rector’s lady, as it appeared to me, rather irrelevantly: “nobody is content in their natural station: some are striving to rise, and others hastening to degrade themselves. There is an immense fuss about education; I never could see the use of it myself: it only makes the lower orders impudent and encroaching; as for the daughters of shopkeepers and professional people, there is really no distinguishing them from the old gentry. The Maynes were manufacturers, and Ellen Mayne was one of the loveliest and sweetest mannered girls I ever saw—quite the young gentlewoman. Then look at

tailor Craddock's daughter just home from boarding-school: she is beautiful, and sings at church as well as Milicent."

"Better, mamma,—twenty thousand times; and tailors' daughters are proverbially handsome," interposed the young lady.

"Let people keep their places. Mr. Mayne has some very radical ideas, and you have imbibed them," retorted Mrs. Pompe: "I heard him telling you yesterday that true education raises men *in* their station, but not *above* it."

"Well, mamma, if our progenitors had all held your theory, we should still reside in caves, promenade the woods sumptuously clad in blue dye, and fare luxuriously every day on acorns."

"Milicent, you are incorrigible!" was the only reply vouchsafed to this; and the elder lady sailed over to where I sat, and asked if the book amused me. It lay open at a medallion portrait of the Duke of Wellington, which was encircled with an allegorical border; while at the bottom, within three inches of the great soldier's nose, couched peacefully the British Lion. Mrs.

Pompe lifted her glass, and with a cursory glance at the portrait observed, "Wellington, I suppose, when he went to see the wild beasts?"

I thought she was jesting; but a look at the set of her full, protruding lip convinced me that she was quite in earnest. No wonder she objected to progress in any shape!

Meanwhile an undertoned colloquy was going on by the fire between my aunt, Milicent, and Miss Conolly, still on the subject of the curate.

"I have thought more than once that he is the least happy and least contented man in the parish," said Miss Pompe.

"That is a strange sentiment, and I hope not a true one," responded Miss Conolly gravely.

"He is a man of great ability; he is ambitious, he is proud, and he is fettered with poverty: therefore it is very likely to be true," was the reply.

"Milicent, it is most unbecoming in you to speak so much of that person," interrupted

Mrs. Pompe angrily. "I wish he were at Broughton."

The young lady laughed very unpleasantly; and to my great relief, Aunt Aurelia and Miss Conolly bade good night, and we departed. It was very fine, and in overshoes and calashes we walked back to the Grange in company.

"Mark my words!" said Miss Conolly emphatically; "if Mr. Mayne makes the smallest effort, he may win Milicent Pompe any day."

"Not a doubt of it," answered my aunt laughing: "she has a nice fortune at her own command, and I think it would be a very sensible thing. There is a great deal of good in Milicent, and he would bring it out. Good night, Miss Conolly: I hope you will not take cold."

With a somewhat bitter cud of reflection to chew I entered the house, not quite certain whether the heart I bore in my bosom was not considerably heavier than when I left it less than four hours before.

Grandmamma had not gone to bed, as her custom was, and she asked a great many questions as

to how I had enjoyed the evening, who had talked to me, and what I had done; if her manner had been of the caressing order, she would certainly have caressed me then.

I could not imagine what this novel affectionateness portended, for it continued during three whole days; and Miss Bootle, who escaped scolding during the interval, wore an air of inflated mystery infinitely laughable and puzzling. Repeatedly my grandmother led the conversation back to the party at the Rectory, as if expecting some unusual confidence from me. At last, one evening, having called me to her room, where the companion was helping her to dress, she observed, after a little desultory chat, that she thought of inviting Mr. Longstaff to dinner on the following Thursday. I tried to say "Indeed!" in a careless way, but my face burnt guiltily. Suddenly my kinswoman turned round upon me with a snap and a scowl, the meaning of which I knew full well. "Kathie Brande, don't think to play the sentimental fool with me!" cried she stormily: "don't pretend to misunderstand me! Mr. Longstaff spoke to me

before he addressed himself to you, and I will never believe that you have been such a born idiot as to refuse him."

My aunt Aurelia entered, but perceiving what was going on, with a glance at me, and a white scared face, she went out again immediately. That momentary vision gave me strength for what was to come: I recalled similar scenes enacted in that very room years ago, which had grown to miserable and shameful end; and I cared no more for the frantic ravings of my grandmother than I should have done for a dull actress going through a dull part. To all she said, whether passionate rebuke, or scornful taunt, or fierce threat, I opposed only a silent, pale resistance.

"I did not think there was such mulish obstinacy in you, Kathie," she concluded by saying; "but if you are determined to fly in the face of fortune and common sense, I will throw you off. Write to your mother, and say you will be at home this day fortnight."

XIX.

Grandmamma and I kept our own counsel: we neither of us sought sympathy abroad. There is a homely French proverb to which most discreet people give heed—" *Il faut laver son linge sale en famille*:" a process we two went through in that bow-windowed dressing-room, many, many times during the ensuing ten days; and then we went out together friendly and smiling, and faced the Crofton world—deceiving it perhaps, perhaps being ourselves alone deceived.

Some of our friends might possibly be going through a similar *rôle* with a like imperturbability. It would be a strange world if all the false-seemings were unmasked: a sorry world, and a sad, if every bleeding heart were to drop its cloak down from the lacerated breast, and lay the anatomy of its suffering bare. I do not think we should get over our griefs any better if we covered ourselves with sackcloth and put ashes

on our heads: people would only hold us up as monuments of righteous judgment, and point to us as sinners above all who are dwelling in our Jerusalem. And the true mourning, after all, is done in secret heart-chambers, where our dead hopes are sepulchred; where they become first a bitter dust, and finally, by some occult transmuting and refining power, they turn to a rich incense, which embalms our memory through long and arid years. Deeds which our acquaintance designate our follies, may at another tribunal be our virtues—our single redeeming points: who judges rightly, who can rightly judge where so many of our efforts are bent to seem other than we are, and the universal conjuring trick of this world is to throw dust expertly in our neighbours' eyes?

I believe my aunt Aurelia suspected at length what proof armour I wore under my girl's frock, but she never hinted at it. Even women the most worldly respect a pure first love; it is the mercenary, interested *affaires de convenance* they mock at and chatter about so unscrupulously.

It is likely enough that they themselves have the true thing hidden sacredly away, like a gem that has come wrongfully into their possession; that they have been into mourning for it; and that, after that period was expired, they learnt to look upon the jewel with composure. Finding it quite old fashioned, chaste but antique, precious but useless, some of them will even keep it all their lives as in a relic box, offering before its shrine annual incense of regrets and tears; others will recklessly barter it away for a gaudy, modern trinket, that they can wear on unblushing brow, and which, in time, they may come to vaunt themselves of having gained.

I have seen such bargains made over and over again.

XX.

Two days after the party at the Rectory, Milicent Pompe originated a picnic to Bishopswood—a beautiful spot, some eight miles from

Crofton. Grandmamma demurred as to the propriety of allowing me to join in it after my criminal behaviour; but Miss Tedo Longstaff having offered to take me in her carriage, I was reluctantly permitted to go.

The morning rose as soft and warm as July, which tempted most of the party to go by water; but grandmamma would not listen to any change of plan for me, and I was shut up in the close chariot with Miss Tedo. Miss Wilton, in her obnoxious cape and feather, rode the miller's pony; Mrs. Pompe, Miss Conolly, and the Doctor, went in their family coach, with great provisions for luncheon; and the rest—Mr. Mayne, Milicent, the Froudes, Reginald Pompe, and several gentlemen impressed from Loughboro for the occasion—went in a boat, intending to land on the beach below Bishopton, and walk up to the inn where we were all to meet.

Much rather would I have been of the latter party; for Miss Tedo was very stiff at first, and looked at me with an injured, resentful countenance, which troubled me far more than

my grandmother's invectives. At length, unbending with a sort of forgiving severity, she informed me that her brother was gone into Wales. I blushed uneasily; which sign of grace caused her to relent still more, and she added, "You have shown yourself a discreet little girl; but I had rather you could have testified a higher appreciation of my excellent brother, all the same: but we have no quarrel against you. Oh, no!"

"I am very sorry to have grieved anybody," was all it came into my head to say.

"Don't let such a thought distress you, I beg! John William was unwise ever to think of such a young wife; but when men get to his age they do unaccountably silly things sometimes. I dare say that in a month's time he will be very thankful that you refused him."

"I shall be very glad, I'm sure."

"Yes, you did not lay yourself out to ensnare him, as some are doing; but I would wish you to know that you may go further and fare worse than you would have done as wife to John

William Longstaff, of the White House. Yes. He has a fine estate, and a very good head of his own. Yes."

Each phrase was emphasized by a little jerking nod; with the last of which Miss Tedo brought herself up into the corner of the chariot in a very tight and erect position, which expressed her virtuously indignant sentiments admirably. I, meanwhile, experienced all the uncomfortable sensations of a school-girl had up for judicious reproof; and not knowing how to propitiate the affronted old lady, I maintained a submissive silence until she spoke again.

"Miss Kathie," she said with austere dignity, "you have acted properly, I allow, and nobody would have been more angry if you had taken advantage of John William's infatuation; but I wish he had not given you the opportunity of inflicting the mortification upon him. He bears you no ill will, neither do I; but, at the same time, I wish it had not happened. It disturbs me to have him away: I am quite alone."

"I am going home next week, Miss Longstaff,

if my being here makes any difference," I replied humbly. "I like your brother very much, and am only sorry to have vexed him. It was not my fault: I would have prevented it if I could; but I did not know he cared for me."

And at this point, to my great relief, the carriage stopped before the door of Bishopton Inn. Miss Wilton, who had just dismounted, and was kilting up her habit for walking, informed us that the rest of the party had gone forward to the wood, and left word for us to follow. Miss Tedo remarked that it was very uncereemonious of them; but Dr. Pompe turning up opportunely to offer his arm, her good humour was restored. They walked on, and Miss Wilton bade me stay with her, insinuating that it would be pleasant to take our time alone.

"Can you laugh?" she demanded suddenly, as we leisurely followed the Doctor and Miss Tedo. ♦

"Yes, under sufficient provocation."

"I am glad to hear it; for I thought when you got out of the carriage that you had been frowned

down for the day. Now, I am not going to join myself to all those people who have gone on before: they have come for their purposes, and I have come for mine: and mine is sketching. Your company suits me: will you stay with me?"

I acceded; not sure whether I was most flattered by her preference or disappointed at not being with those whom I knew better. There were clearly no social intentions on my companion's part; for as soon as Dr. Pompe and Miss Tedo were out of sight, she sat down by the road side to sketch Bishopton Inn. It was one of those pretty rural hostelries which are fast disappearing from the land: it had a great projecting porch, lattice windows, and a lofty gable surmounted with ball and spike, and half buried in ivy. There was a green in front with a large pond, across which a line of grand old oaks threw a broad mass of shadow. My companion sketched rapidly; but she informed me, for my comfort and sustenance, that in a ride this way the day before she had marked down several

picturesque bits of scenery for transference to her drawing-book ; so that I need not expect soon to rejoin the rest of our party.

Bishopswood skirted the great Langland estates, formerly ecclesiastical property, and still preserving the remembrance of what they were in the designations of their several parts. Its depths were craggy and precipitous, and gave rise to the Monksburn, which wound its hidden way amongst stones and underwood until it reached the meadows ; whence, almost circling Bishopton, it afterwards ran to the sea below, through a stony gully called Prior's-death.

At Bishopton there existed previous to the Reformation a richly endowed monastery, the tenants of which had been driven out by royal mandate, and their dwelling razed to the ground. Its ruins were still to be traced in the vicinity of the church. From this place, with occasional breaks where it had for convenience been levelled, there extended to a deep hollow in the forest a sort of terrace, once enclosed between two lines of elms, and still called the Abbot's Walk.

Cowled figures were said by the superstitious to haunt the Walk, especially on bleak, wintry nights such as that when the king's order came; and a great white stone, over which neither moss nor lichen grew, went by the name of Abbot's-pillow, because tradition related that beside it the body of the venerable superior was found, sheeted with snow, the morning after he was driven from the monastery. Another of the monkish fraternity met his death in the gully through which the beck rushed to the sea; and hence its designation of Prior's - death. This burn ran almost parallel with Abbot's Walk; and several times, as Miss Wilton and I wandered leisurely on, had I to smother my impatience while my enthusiastic companion sat down to sketch.

Sometimes it was the gnarled twisted trunk of a decayed oak stretching its arms across the shallow burn that attracted her attention; then it was a group of cattle standing in the water to drink; and again some curiously tinted cottage, picturesquely ruinous, and long since deserted.

She demanded my admiration frequently; but at last she shut up her book, and said with a curious smile, "Our heart's in the woodlands! well, let us go!"

I could not help feeling as if she had discovered my secret, especially when she added, "Kathie Brande, you have the patience of a saint! Let me predict your future for you. Cross my hand that I may tell you true."

We were down by the burn; so I sprinkled a few drops of water on her palm, and said I hoped it was holy enough still to warn away evil prophecies.

"We shall see: now, like a real gipsy, let me read the lines of your hand and face; then I will pronounce.—You shall hope long and pertinaciously; you shall have much struggle and suffering; final calm, and great happiness; and a heart and strength for all."

"Thanks! you are quite oracular: I dare not seek to know more. The prediction would suit Sybil Froude as well, or Milicent Pompe either."

"No, it would not. It suits you, and nobody else."

"But everybody has sun and storm, happiness and sorrow."

"Stuff, my dear child! there are natures so dull, selfish, and insensible, that, providing they eat and sleep, nothing moves them. Their passions are like stagnant water, their vices and virtues all negatives. They are born, and they die—that is the sum of them. Their happiness never rises above a lethargic content, and their unhappiness never exceeds a vague sense of disturbance in their torpor. Let them be: we have nothing to do with them. I like the fine clay through which the vivid soul shines like a star, not the dense earthen pipkins that the rushlight cannot penetrate. You and I think and feel more in one month than the rudely fashioned vessels do in a whole lifetime."

"Oh, no! you are mistaken in me: I am very ignorant and slow. I know nothing! Everybody says so!" I interrupted hastily.

"Everybody is an earthen pipkin!" was the

reply. "Does your priest, Felix Mayne, say so? He knows better. You have a fine intelligence, cultivated by thought, solitude, and observation—the truest intelligence. You have not read many books, you have not gone through the whole manual of modern accomplishments successfully (No, indeed! thought I), and you have not lived long enough to know society; but you have a sense to see, and see justly—to understand, and that quickly. I approved you from that moment when you came up to me at your grandmother's house, and offered me flowers, with a little shy look that said, as plainly as words could have done, 'Don't class me with all these people who have laughed at you.'"

I reddened, and confessed that some such thought had been in my mind.

"Yes. What you feel you show: your face is a sad tell-tale. I watched you at the Rectory the other night, when you were in the boudoir. For a long while your countenance was still, and simply observant; but when its play began there

was a shrewd turn, both of eye and lip, which marked your ready appreciation of all that was notable amongst the guests. For a time you were passive, as if waiting for something; then anxious and meditative; and finally your eyes kindled with a very glad light: if I were a man, and loved you, I should like your eyes to brighten so for me. You seemed very well contented all the evening after, though anybody might have thought you were having a very dull time of it."

"I am rarely dull," said I, shrinking a little from my companion's inquisitorial probe.

"Because you extract food for fancy from everything and every person that comes in your way. You do not talk: many people think there is nothing in you all the time that you are unconsciously reading off their little shams, peculiarities, and general traits of character, and storing them up in your mind for afterthought. If you were a writer, you would reproduce them mellowed and toned down, with all the coarseness refined out of them; for you have an instinctive shrinking from

whatever is base, that leads you to idealize human nature, and think of it better than it deserves; and what you cannot but condemn, you strive to cover with the wide mantle of your charity. You are not suspicious, and you are tenaciously hopeful. Then you have veneration strong, which gives you faith in goodness, and a great admiration for all that is lofty and noble. But there is a measure of weakness in you too: you are never certain of yourself; you will act impulsively, and then fret yourself for days with the idea that perhaps the impulse was wrong and the deed faulty. If you see that any one looks down on you, you don't resent it, but feel oppressed with your insignificance, and endeavour to rise in their esteem; but I imagine that to be incidental to your training. Were you thrown on your own resources, you would fight your battle independently."

"Is it pleasant to write books?" I asked, thinking that myself had been quite sufficiently discussed.

"Very pleasant! It is happiness enough for me now; I do not much care for its annoyances.

Sybil Froude said to me a few days since, with her ineffably-patronizing air, ‘ I presume *you* feel yourself above domestic matters and lady’s work, which we like so much?’ It is a fact that I can handle a needle as deftly as any woman : I do not relish being looked upon as incapable, and deficient in common sense ; which I am not. The same young lady also confided to me that hitherto she had looked upon female writers as disreputable and dangerous characters ; indeed, I see that many of the respectable people do regard the gift as a mental twist and deformity—a visitation like blindness, a wen, or any other physical defect—something that they may treat with a sort of lofty, half-contemptuous pity. Sybil thanked Heaven piously that she was not a clever woman, because men hate clever women ; upon which Milicent Pompe, who was present, handed to me a literary curiosity, which she laughingly stated to be her friend’s highest mental effort. It began—

“ ‘ DEAR MILICENT,

“ ‘ Will you look in the top, right-hand drawer

of the wardrobe of the room where I slept when I was at your house in London, and you will find a small box which I left behind. Unlock it with the key I enclose, and in the second compartment (the nob is off the lid, and you will have to raise it with your penknife) you will find some pearl buttons. Please take one of the plain ones and get it matched with a dozen of the same kind: I want them for a lovely new habit-shirt. My bonnet came safely: it is sweetly pretty. How is dear little Tiny?' &c. &c.

“Milicent assured me that she considered this specimen a favourable one, for it was neither scandalous, ill-natured, nor ill-spelt; and asked if I did not think it an excellent diploma of the young lady's domestic virtues. I need not inquire if you have friends amongst these girls, for I am sure you cannot have: they despise us both, from the depths of their little minds—you as insignificant, me as unfeminine.”

“You don't care, then, not to be loved?”

“I can exist without it. I don't like personal

abuse: I shrink from it naturally, as I do from all things harsh and disagreeable; but the momentary soreness past, I feel quite indifferent. Not long since, Miss Tedo Longstaff, a well-intentioned but very impertinent old lady, lectured me on the satirical passages in my books, until I was obliged to remind her that we are bee-like in our propensities, and cull our store from every pasture; but instead of visiting only sweet flowers, we extract a pungent kind of honey from nettles and brambles, and that some tastes relish the wild honey more than the dulcet syrup. Then she wanted to know if ever I took people off, and I had much difficulty in convincing her that accidental resemblances must occur in books that are true to nature; but that I had never in my life sat down deliberately to take a portrait, though I must have reproduced the results of my observations in society over and over again. She thought it very wrong, and advised me to write essays and moral lectures."

"They would be safe at least; but in so-called personalities people are not half so ready to take

a laughable resemblance to themselves as they are to fit it to their friends and acquaintance. They are quick enough to cry, 'How like so and so!' but I never heard anybody say, 'How very like me!'"

Miss Wilton laughed. "Nor I," said she; "and if you give any book the reputation of being personal, how eager everybody suddenly becomes to read it."

I blushed, remembering how we had all rushed to Loughboro Library after Miss Tedo's report on Miss Wilton's own books; and she gave me a quick convicting glance which told that she knew of our avidity and aggravation quite as well as I did.

"Tell me what character was given unto you, Kathie Brande?" she asked. I informed her. "And were you vexed? You must have seen the absurdity of the charge."

"So I did; but I did not like having such a disagreeable reputation fixed on me: I fancied there must have been some resemblance, or Miss Tedo would not have said so."

"My dear child, she would have said so under

any circumstance; for she pounced on the book with no other intent than to share out its characters amongst the good folks of Crofton. I was infinitely amused when the Loughboro man told me into what a state of excitement the whole of the innocent community had been thrown by that old story written three years before I ever saw any of them. But here we are in the wood: do you know which way we must take?"

I did not know, but thought the hollow to which Abbot's Walk led the most likely place; so we still kept to the now less distinctly marked terrace, and by and by the sound of voices warned us that we were approaching our party.

"We shall only come in for the crumbs of the feast," observed Miss Wilton. "Are you indifferent to the good things of this world? I confess that I am not."

And indeed when we entered the hollow we found that only Sybil Froude, looking very sour, Dr. Pompe, Mr. Mayne, and Miss Tedo, were there; all the rest were sauntering gradually away by twos and threes to explore the bonnie

wild forest glades. I proposed that we should possess ourselves of some fragments, and do likewise; but my companion needed comfortable refreshment, and drew near to Sybil, who sat mournfully amongst the relics of the luncheon, eating biscuits.

"What is the matter?" Miss Wilton kindly asked. Sybil pointed to a white net bonnet lying much crushed on the grass besides her. "Reginald Pompe sat down upon it," she tearfully explained.

"A new bonnet is very near to a pretty woman's heart; but don't grieve, Sybil," said Miss Wilton: "if you could weep a flood, its shape would never be restored. Never let that squashed bit of finery spoil your pleasure! I can see it in your eye at this minute, it has taken all the flavour out of the veal-pie, turned the champagne into bitters, and the macaroons into saw-dust; worse, it is taking away all the zest of the many compliments you have received to-day: cheer up!"

Sybil smiled dolefully, and twirled the wreck

round on her finger, asking with a touching pathos if we had ever seen such a thing in our lives before, and if it were possible for her to put it on to go home in.

“Certainly; let me straighten it for you,” replied Miss Wilton, and she really did contrive to elicit some shape out of it again. “There! but for a perverse little twist in the crown it would be all right;” and she replaced it on Sybil’s head with the assurance that except for the cloud in her own eyes she looked as well as she did when she left home. “Well then, I’ll walk with you; and Miss Tedo shall take me home in her chariot, and Kathie Brande can go in the boat: will you?”

“Yes; I should like the exchange.”

While Miss Wilton and I were preparing to fortify ourselves with luncheon, Reginald Pompe came back to fetch Sybil, and Mr. Mayne to attend upon us.

“Where have you been wandering?” he asked. Miss Wilton passed him her sketch-book; but just as he was going to sit down with us, and look it

over, Doctor Pompe arrived to ask whether he would go up to those springs at Woodhead that they had been talking about, and he went away with the Rector at once.

“Ah!” thought I sighing; “I shall not see him any more now, and I counted on such a happy day!”

“Never mind, Kathie: you are going home in the boat!” said Miss Wilton, answering my thought in an uncanny way, that made me reflect whether it would not be as well to wear a mask when in her company.

She rallied me good-naturedly on my lack of appetite; and when she had lunched herself, proposed that we should resume our stroll and artistic researches. We did so, and wandered deep into the wood; but we encountered none of the party, and supposed they had gone in other directions. Miss Wilton was bent on finding the place where the Monksburn rose; and dragged me on through craggy difficult places and soft spongy ground, until I was ready to drop with fatigue. At last we came to a ledge of grey

rock, down the face of which trickled little lines of moisture; below a tuft of alders, a gush of ice-cold water poured like a miniature fall, and wearing itself a bed amongst the stones, babbled the secret of its way through the wood to all listeners. This was Monksburn; and Miss Wilton said she must sketch the romantic vignette it would make. I was patient enough now, knowing that my day was gone. We stayed there so long, and loitered so much by the way in returning, that when we passed through the hollow not a vestige of our party was to be seen: servants, hampers—everything had disappeared; neither did we overtake any of them in going along Abbot's Walk to Bishopton.

Miss Wilton knew a short cut to the beach where the boat was left in the morning; so, instead of going to the village, we descended thither; but, to our dismay, we were told that it had gone "most of an hour ago." We posted up to the inn in haste—the carriages had gone too.

"Never mind, Kathie: millers' horses always

carry double: you shall ride home behind me," said Miss Wilton, cheerfully.

Indeed, there was nothing else for it. Oh, how grandmamma would scold! The woman at the inn lent me a skirt and a warm cape, and a sort of pad being put on the pony, there was I mounted behind Miss Wilton. The effect must have been ludicrous in the extreme; for as we started at a slow pace, a broad grin on every face bade us good-by.

"Keep up your spirits, Kathie: it will be dusk when we make our triumphal entry into Crofton," said my companion. "This is not a very elegant mode of conveyance, but in an emergency it is not to be despised. I wish I could make a sketch of our appearance."

I cannot say that I appreciated the comicality of it so much as Miss Wilton did, for I was excessively tired, not a little disappointed, and by no means cheered with the prospect of grandmamma's displeasure.

The September day was already closing when we left Bishopton, and as we could only go at a

foot-pace, the dusk overtook us several miles from Crofton. It was a beautiful clear twilight, and the sun set beyond Marton Nab in a crimson flush of glory.

A silent fit had come upon Miss Wilton; at last she said, "This time of day always inclines me to blinking retrospections. It is of no use to turn up the sods that cover the graves of past pleasures and past pains; but once our youth past, all women who are alone do it. You live in the future, I in the past: there is nothing for me to look forward to except growing old. But how wrong of me to talk dismally to a young thing like you, dwelling in golden dream-land still!"

She relapsed into silence for some time; and then, to my surprise, began to whistle very deftly the air of "Auld Lang Syne."

This was a novel accomplishment; and the tune ended, she said, "I had two brothers and no sister; we lived alone with my father; our mother was dead; they taught me boyish sports, and I caught up their trick of whistling. I shall never leave it off now: it reminds me of them. They

are both dead." And she glided into the lively tune of "Molly Bawn." It ceased suddenly, and she exclaimed, "Here comes somebody to meet us!" It was Mr. Mayne.

"Well, did everybody think we were lost?" cried Miss Wilton as he came up.

"There was a misunderstanding: Sybil Froude told us she was going in one of the carriages, but she never recollected to mention Kathie; therefore we did not wait. You must be weary, child," he said to me.

"Not so very tired." Indeed, the sensation of heaviness left me directly I heard his voice.

"We conjectured how you would get home; but your grandmamma was so restless and uneasy, that I said I would come and look for you. Have you had a pleasant day?"

"Yes."

He walked alongside of us all the way until we came to the Grange, and then went in with me, which diverted my grandmother's wrath for the time into the direction of Sybil Froude; but, for a punishment, she pretended to think I appeared

so worn out as to need sending to bed immediately; and as Mr. Mayne stayed to tea, it was a punishment, and a grievous one too.

XXI.

Towards the end of the week the weather changed abruptly: for three days there was a storm; the sea one heave of foam and wrath, the sky one mass of lurid cloud. During that period Mr. Mayne did not come to the Grange, and I missed my lesson in consequence. I tried to think it was business that had kept him away; but I knew he had been at the Rectory twice. On the third evening, we were all at home, and, as it chanced, quite alone. I had taken a book and sat by the fire; not reading, however, but listening to the angry sounds that convulsed the air: the cracking thunder, the ponderous roll of the wind, the breaking of the waves upon the shore, the tossing and rustling of the garden trees, and the peevish rattle of doors and windows.

More than once through the tempestuous wrack I had heard a long, dull sound ; it was repeated very distinctly a third and fourth time, while we were all silent : I asked what it was, and we listened intently for some minutes ; then the low boom of a gun was heard above the whistling winds and the roaring waves.

“ A vessel on the reef ! ” cried my aunt Aurelia, and we all rushed to the window ; a fierce spasm of pain clutched my heart, as vividly uprose from my imagination a vision of death in the midst of that wild uproar. There was a heaving blackness outside, riven at intervals by spears of lightning and clouds of driving rain ; and through it all, like the groan of a soul in agony, came the echo of the signal gun.

We had stood perhaps five minutes hearkening in silence, when a quick, light step came across the lawn, and a flash of lightning revealed the figure of Milicent Pompe. We went out into the hall to meet her ; she was very pale, and her hair, all loose and wet, hung about her throat, while she trembled excessively ; whether with

cold or excitement it was impossible to tell. Grandmamma brought her into the drawing-room, and asked what had possessed her to leave the house on such a night. She made no answer, but stood on the hearth, wringing the moisture from her hair and looking bewildered. Aunt Aurelia offered to give her some wine, but she put it back with her hand impatiently, and said, "You have heard the gun from the brig on the reef—you hear it now! Mr. Mayne has been dining with us, and he is gone down to the shore: the men are afraid to go out to the crew's rescue, and he will go. Why should he risk his life? They must know the danger better than he does. It is rash folly!" She spoke in a hard, unnatural tone, as if labouring under violent and repressed feeling. I had drawn close to her side, laying my hand on her arm, and was listening breathlessly: she looked suddenly into my face, and said sharply, "You are not afraid of wind and rain, are you?"

"No."

"Then come with me: we may dissuade him from putting his life into such useless peril."

"Nay! I should bid him go, rather than hold back," was my reply. I do not think, however, that she heard it; for though grand-mamma, Aunt Aurelia, and Miss Bootle, all lifted up an alarmed remonstrance, she pulled me into the hall, wrapped a plaid with her own trembling hands over my head and throat, and with a painful grip on my arm hurried me out into the night.

"Listen!" cried she, as we ran along under the creaking trees to the gate which led from the shrubbery into the lane—"Listen! there is the gun again, so no boat has reached the brig; perhaps none has started, and we may be in time."

We crossed the road, and stumbled down the sandhills towards a spot where we dimly discerned a group of seamen; who, from the loudness and violence of their voices, appeared to be quarrelling.

We stopped. "Some of them are gone," said Milicent; "he is not there."

We listened, and gathered from the next few words that, incited by Mr. Mayne, some of the boldest seamen had put off with him to the wreck.

"I was sure of it!" gasped my companion, and her clutch on my arm tightened until I could scarcely forbear crying out with the pain. She drew me a few paces further off, and sat down on the sand as if incapable of supporting herself longer; she trembled convulsively, and I could feel her quick, panting sobs as she leant against me. At length her grasp on my arm relaxed, and I rose up watchful and patient.

Strange! I had no fear for the issue; and was calmer and more myself than I had been when standing by the window in the warm, well-lighted room. It was almost like gazing into a wall of darkness; except when the lightning revealed the foam churned in white ridges along the shore, and the dense masses of cloud that whirled across the sky. Once or twice, beyond the black swell, I saw a spark shining through the spray, which I supposed to be a light hung out by the brig for the guidance of the boat; and also the dark hull of the vessel lying motionless where it had struck, its mast broken, and the sea washing over it.

Milicent had not stirred from her crouching posture, when suddenly a shout ran through the night. "Saved! saved!" was the cry. She then started to her feet, and rushed towards the group of seamen, who were drawing in a strong cable. I followed, trusting that in the confusion we should escape observation; for now several women had come down to the shore, and were adding at least their voices to the efforts of the men. Soon the boat with its human freight grated on the sand; a tall bareheaded figure leaped into the surf, and waded to the shore, carrying in his arms a slight boy, who, from his nerveless attitude, appeared to be either dead or insensible.

A flash from a lantern struck across this man's face as he resigned his burthen into the hands of the women, and revealed to us the features of Mr. Mayne; he was ghastly white, and his black hair hanging wet over his brow made him scarcely recognisable. His lips were close set, and he did not speak a syllable as he returned through the surf to the boat. Several persons had been set on shore; how many I saw not, being intent on

the proceedings of those still in the boat: it was pushed off again, and disappeared in the mist and darkness. There were still five individuals on the wreck, some one cried. The next quarter of an hour was one of voiceless agony: Milicent hung like a dead weight on my arm; the fury of the storm seemed to be redoubled. It was all we could do to maintain our footing against the wind. We had approached the water, and the foam curled over our feet while we were drenched with the flying spray and the rain; ever and anon the lightning gleamed athwart the sky, and showed us the anxious waiting group on shore, and the dark heaving sea beyond.

Now the boat was returning: yet a few minutes, and it would be safe. A wild cheer arose, as if to give encouragement to men whose strength might yet fail them. It was repeated: twice—thrice. Then for a moment a dead silence, as if even the storm hearkened; and a long, triumphant yell went down the wind, as the boat, broken by the fury of the waves, sank within ten yards of the shore. Milicent cowered down

with her face hidden against me. I watched—silent, strung up, calm. Out of that peril *he* would come unscathed, I knew. And so it was. There was the shrill cry of one “strong swimmer in his agony;” but Mr. Mayne, and the rest, battled their way to the shore, sorely beaten and exhausted, but still living men.

“He is safe!” I whispered in my companion’s ear. She lifted her head, looked wildly towards the spot where he stood for a moment, and then, in spite of resistance on my part, began dragging me in the direction of the sandhills.

“What did we come out for if this is all we can do?” I could not help asking: “could we not be of use to some of those poor creatures?”

“They will be taken care of: they always are,” was Milicent’s reply; then as I still held back she added passionately, “Do come on! Do you want to be laughed at? Oh! you are lead or ice, surely.”

It seemed then as if we had been guilty of a very foolish and undignified escapade; and as I had as little wish to be ridiculous as she had,

I no longer resisted. She ran stumbling along in the loose sandy road, never relaxing her grasp on my arm, while the rain driving in our faces half blinded us. On coming to the garden gate she stopped.

“I am not going in,” said she; “I must make haste home: they fancy I went to my room ill. Promise me one thing—that you will not tell where we have been to-night. Promise!” I did promise. “I can trust Mrs. Marston,” added she; and then, with a short, hot grip of my hand, she left me, and hastened on towards the Rectory.

My grandmother and aunt Aurelia received me at the door, with Sharpe looming severely in the background; and I was hustled up-stairs, where Miss Bootle was preparing possets, without being permitted to say a single word. The waiting-woman applied herself to the task of removing my wet garments; and remarked parenthetically that I must sorely have needed a task to set out on such a wild-goose chase that fleysome night. My aunt was anxious to get

her out of the room, and when we were by ourselves she questioned me eagerly about Milicent.

I told about the wreck, and the loss of the boat, but evaded speaking of my companion; as well from delicacy towards her, as from an indefinite pain it gave myself.

"Kathie is wiser than Milicent," said my grandmother; "if the foolish girl cannot keep her own counsel, the fewer confidantes of her absurdity the better."

XXII.

I was left to toss and tumble through a weary, restless night. If I slept for a few moments, miserable dreams harassed me. Either Milicent was dragging from my shoulders a tattered cloak which sheltered my limbs from the bitter frost, or she was wresting out of my arms a perishing child; then mocking at me, down on my knees, lonely, helpless, and despairing. Again I was on

the sea-shore, watching with straining eyes' a diminishing speck on the water, which seemed to take away with it my very life of life. Then I was in the Minster, kneeling beside a grave : grass grew out between the stones of the pavement, and all looked like death and desolation.

I awoke in the morning with a dull sense of pain and prostration somewhere, but where I could not tell : it was mental rather than physical, I suspect. Striving to put it away from me, I arose. The wind had fallen, and both sea and sky were wrapped in a blank of lead-hued mist.

" It is the weather : it always influences me," I said to myself, and began to dress.

Sharpe came in : she observed something unusual possibly, for she remarked, " You must just get into your bed again, if you don't want to have a fever, Miss Kathie. This comes of being wet to the skin."

I accepted her explanation, and obeyed ; glad to cover my face from the light, and to be still. By and by grandmamma and Aunt Aurelia came softly in ; but I feigned sleep, not wishing to be

questioned; so they went out again, and left me alone.

My mind was in great disorder: a blind, helpless fear seemed to be maundering to and fro in it; shapeless, yet all pervading; intangible as night darkness, but as black.

Towards noon my aunt entered. "Kathie, are you awake?" she asked. I uncovered my face and looked up. "You are not ill; only tired, I hope. If you don't feel better before evening, we must send for Dr. Martin."

She took my hand, which was burning with fever, in her cool, pleasant grasp. I saw she had not said all she came to say. "Mr. Mayne has been here making most particular inquiries about you, Kathie," she went on. "I fancy he more than half suspects where you were last night; so when you see him again you must be careful not to betray it, for Milicent Pompe's sake: she is very foolish to expose herself as she does. She has been here too, and she was very anxious to come up, but my mother would not have you disturbed."

"I will not be made her confidante, Aunt

Aurelia. Keep her away from me!" I hastily exclaimed. My aunt made no reply beyond slightly elevating her eyebrows; and then advising me to try to sleep, she went away. In the afternoon up she came again, and grandmamma too.

"Well, Kathie, how do you feel now?" asked the latter. "Mr. Mayne had to come into the village again, so he called and left these for you."

They were a few late roses, very beautiful and very fragrant; but where she placed them on the coverlet I let them lie, untouched.

"Poor child! she is quite heavy and dull," said my aunt kindly. "Have you any pain, Kathie?"

"No."

"Then will you get up by and by? Milicent is coming in to spend the evening, and perhaps we may have Mr. Mayne too. It would be more cheerful on the couch down-stairs than here alone."

I entreated to be left in peace for that day, promising to be quite well on the morrow; so they let me have my own way.

All the evening, while Milicent Pompe was singing in the drawing-room, the roses lay wither-

ing. I never once put forth my hand to take them, though my eyes scarcely wandered from their rich crimson, until in the evening dusk they were undistinguishable from the surrounding white. Miss Bootle, coming in with my tea, espied them; and saying it was a pity the poor things should die for want of a drop of water, put them in a glass on the toilette-table. By morning they had revived, and some of the buds were half blown.

During the silent, dark hours I had time to gather my strength about me, and to take myself severely to task. My curbless fancy had well nigh borne me into unfathomable abysses of shame and wretchedness. I had been wilfully deceiving myself, and deserved the rude shock which had forced me upon the truth.

Who and what was I, that I should look to be loved? Milicent was a beautiful and passionate woman; and where she gave her love, equal return would surely flow back to her: it could not be otherwise. Let me remember this. I fell asleep with that thought weighing on me like a night-

mare, but awoke at dawn quietened, and without the lassitude and depression that had made all so hopeless the day before. I rose immediately, dressed, and wrote a long letter to my mother, in which I dwelt much on my return home. As I sealed it, almost unconsciously the words escaped my lips, "I wish I had never seen Crofton."

Then I set my window open, that I might feel the sharp morning air upon my face; it came blowing over the roses, gently rifling them of their perfume, which it wafted towards me like a plea for kindly thoughts of the donor. With the first sound of movement in the house I descended to the garden with a plaid over my head. There was hoar frost on the ground, and on the trees, on which the lingering green of summer was changing to crimson, brown, and golden yellow. The storm had beaten off the leaves in the shrubbery, where they lay in sodden masses on the paths, drifted in heaps against the beech-tree boles, and whirled over the dead wild flowers, which they half buried.

The beauty of autumn was ever to me a

melancholy beauty. Nature draws up her veil of cloud and frost over her head, and sits low on the earth, mourning with wild storm-winds like dying groans and sobs; weeping floods of dreary tears, while decay sweeps round her pleasant haunts, and makes them dank, bare, and cold as empty sepulchres.

Pacing slowly and thoughtfully in the grey chill morning, I seemed to see stretched out before me the vista of a long life: laborious, blank, with little cheer, and but dim, lowly, hopes. Already it appeared that my rede was being spun for me, and that I had but to look on and submit. My childish impatience and wilfulness being gone, into their place had come, in lieu of higher trust, a certain passive humility; half fatalist perhaps. I said to myself, "*Che sarà, sarà,*" and ceased struggling with the blind time that had overtaken me.

At breakfast I observed that Aunt Aurelia kept her eyes studiously averted from my face; and when it was over, grandmamma advised me to take a long walk on the sands, to blow away

the remains of my feverishness. Really glad to be alone, I left the house; but not in the direction indicated. I wanted to be up once more on those purple-black moors, high, high above the salt mist and the monotonous wave-song; so I turned into the fields, and tramped along their upland paths, and through the grass, lush with heavy rains, until I emerged on the heath, which lay wild and wide below a sky of silvery grey, flecked over with small, snowy clouds. On the horizon still hung huge watery masses which the storm had not yet swept away, and seawards was a dim haze enveloping all, as in a cloak. I had crossed this moor in the coach on coming to Crofton—what a gap lay between that time and the present!—it stretched for miles away, an even surface of now fading heather; a desolate expanse suggestive of wintry winds and drifting snows. A cross-road, very rugged and stony, seemed to strike into the heart of the moor-land; and taking it in preference to the highway, I followed it for a couple of miles, until it divided into two

branches ; one tending eastward to the sea, the other going in a northerly direction.

A great block of stone, perhaps intended to serve as a guide to travellers, furnished me with a resting-place, and I sat down to think in the deep solitude. I was far above the valley here, in one of nature's grand, indefinite, calms ; the air was, for the present, almost as still as in a pictured landscape, and there was a pale, clear shining out of the sky which made no shadows, but only a gentle suffusion of warm light through the atmosphere. There was the subdued murmur of the ocean-life far off ; the distant shout of the waggoner to his team, and the whistle of people labouring in the fields ; and nearer the insect-voices in and out amongst the heather.

Mine was then that mood which is infinitely soothed by the balm of peace and natural beauty ; not that wounded spirit which turns away, sick alike of earth and heaven. Affection had warmed my heart, but passion had not scorched it, nor disappointment frozen. There

was cloud in my sky, but no storm of death-dealing potency; under that cloud I might walk subdued for a little while, but it would disperse. I was glad that I was going home. There would be peace and safety, and household affections warm and true, between which and me no interloper could come. For Milicent—rich, beautiful, brilliant—were the first-fruits of the love that had given me—a weak, pale girl—a shelter under its summer boughs, and some fragrant blossoms swept down by gentle sighing winds.

“Let me be content,” I said: “the timely shelter has refreshed me. It may be remembered with pleasantness; never with regret, never with pain.”

XXIII.

For two hours or more I stayed up there communing with my own thoughts; and rose, at length, to return home, patient and almost

cheerful. I took the steep descent to the east, instead of the way I had come, because it seemed shorter; and there was a darkening in the atmosphere as if the storm were brewing up again. From the edge of the moor came sailing heavily those great packed clouds, driven onwards and onwards by others behind them, and followed by a strong cold wind.

Half an hour's brisk walking brought me to a green lane, shut in between two high hedges: warning drops had then begun to fall, and soon the storm broke—pitiless, drenching. Uncertain of my whereabouts, I tramped steadily forward, hopeful of meeting with some friendly roof before I was half drowned. But the lane was long, straight, and unsatisfactory; it seemed indeed to lead nowhere; and the propriety of retracing my steps before I got further entangled had just begun to suggest itself, when I espied a light curl of smoke above the hedge, and, a few paces further on, a little wicket-gate. It was Mr. Mayne's cottage.

I had been there once before; but, having come

by a different route, the locality looked quite strange to me: it was, indeed, the last place in the world to which I should have voluntarily gone for shelter; but Hannah, who was standing in the porch, apparently on the look out for some one, descried me in an instant, and called to me to go in. I hesitated, and made as if I would proceed; but she came hastily down the streaming path, and said that she could not answer to her master for letting me pass by in such a storm. "So come your ways in, Miss: the rain will be overed in an hour," persisted she.

I suffered myself to be persuaded; and was led into the Curate's parlour: a queer bow-windowed room full of little nooks and corners, and littered with books. A cheerful fire burnt in the grate, before which reposed the Dean, now a fine well-grown cat; and high in the window hung a pretty brass-wire cage, in which a bullfinch was carolling melodiously. The housekeeper hung my shawl to dry, and then began to speak of the storm of the night before last.

"Little thought I where he was in it all," said

she; "but I might have guessed: it's so like him to be perilling his life whenever he gets a chance. He's gone now to bury that poor lad that was drowned off the wreck. He belonged to Marton." She gave me some details respecting the drowned sailor and his family, which showed that she took an interest in the people to whom she belonged, deeper than is often the case with persons of her class. She was indeed a faithful, unselfish, kind creature.

Observing that I watched the bird in the window, she asked if I had one; and when I answered that I had not, she told me I should have the pretty little songster in the cage.

"But, perhaps, Hannah," said I, "your master may not like you to give it away."

She stopped me quickly. "Oh, Miss! I hear him talk: bless you, *I* know," said she. "He has brought it up for *somebody*, and that somebody's you. Why, if you was Ellen herself, I don't think he could like you better than he does."

Hannah's shrewd grey eyes were on me as she spoke; and I coloured deeply, with strange mixed

feelings. "Take off your bonnet, Miss, till the rain gives over, or you'll get heated, and may be catch cold when you go out," she advised.

I did so; upon which she took my face between her hands, kissed me, said I was "real bonnie," and she "didn't wonder." I laughed confusedly, and replied that I wished everybody would look at me through her partial spectacles. This metaphorical expression led her to descant upon the virtues of good eyesight, which she declared to have been hereditary in her family for many generations: witness her mother and grandmother, who both read their Bibles without glasses up to their deaths, at seventy-nine and eighty-two. By this time the rain had partially ceased, and I rose to go; but Hannah put me back into my chair, with a little gentle force, that might have been greater had I resisted.

"If it's Master you're afraid of, he won't be in till dusk, I expect, for after the burying he'll go to Marton;" said she with a smile that would have been quizzical if it had not been so kind.

Though not afraid of Mr. Mayne, I did certainly not desire to meet him that day. I think if it had fallen to me to decide, I should have chosen to go home to Eversley without meeting him again; and when I had got there, I should have bitterly regretted it—as we so often have to regret proud, wilful deeds when they are done, and hasty words when they have gone from us beyond recall. My confusion, therefore, was extreme, when from my seat by the fire I heard the gate clash, and Hannah cried, “Master’s changed his mind: he’s come back.”

She bustled out into the entrance to receive him, while I hastily flung on my shawl, re-tied my bonnet, and prepared for instant departure; wishing myself at home, on the moor, on the reef—anywhere but where I was. Still this was very foolish; I knew it was, but yet could not prevent my colour from changing absurdly when Mr. Mayne entered, dripping at every point, and shaking hands, told me that I was weather-bound for yet an hour to come, and must have some luncheon before I thought of stirring. He was

so matter-of-fact, cordial, and frank, that it was far easier for me to accept in the same spirit than to invent any sufficient excuse to go away; for the rain was again pouring in torrents. I was left alone for about a quarter of an hour; for Hannah, who seemed to be a privileged domestic tyrant, told her master to change his things if he did not want to catch his death. While he was absent, I took a book, and tried to read, but only one idea would present itself: how happy I was to be in the sunshine of my master's presence! how completely the sore fretting pain at my heart was forgotten when I heard his voice! When he came in again, he stirred up the fire, took his easy chair, and told Hannah to bring in luncheon; which she presently did.

"By the by, Kathie, you were down on the seashore the night before last," he suddenly said. It was fortunate he did not look at me, for the blood flushed scarlet in my face, and so startled was I, that no answer came. "I suppose you are an admirer of nature in all her moods: her fierce one is certainly not the least sublime.

Perhaps you had never witnessed such a scene before?" I had not. "I was not surprised to see you there; for when Kathie Brande takes it into her head, she both says and does strange things. But your companion—what brought her out? I acquit her of all enthusiasm for the charms of nature and danger."

"Whim, perhaps; I cannot say."

Mr. Mayne smiled: it was a peculiar smile; doubtful, sarcastic, not pleasant. "Being there, what was it that caused you both to run off in such haste? Was it the wind, the rain, or that your curiosity was satisfied? Or was it that you feared to be seen."

I blushed an affirmative.

"There it is! I have observed often that it is our best actions which seem to lie most open to ridicule and misconstruction: what a paradoxical state of things it is! Kathie, were you ashamed of being seen to take an interest in your fellow creatures? If you were, it was a weakness alien to your real character."

I attempted no self-exculpation, lest I should

say too much; and, diverging from the personal strain into which the conversation was tending, Mr. Mayne told me that the vessel which had been wrecked, was from Leith, bound to London; and that the young man who had been drowned was a sailor who had voyaged over every sea in the globe—in frozen Polar Regions, in breezeless Indian seas; and yet, after a life of peril, it was his fate to perish within sight of home. Hannah uttered an ejaculation of pity; and her master said she must go and visit the drowned man's mother, who was sorely smitten by his loss.

“It is not good to speculate on the ways of Providence,” he added after a pause; “but it is difficult at times to see why events fall out as they do. I had a friend once—Arthur Crawford—he was my school-fellow and college companion; a fine soldierly, enthusiastic fellow; full of energy and fire, capable of self-sacrifice, prompt, intelligent, armed for every emergency: so good a tool might have done a long day's work; yet he was drowned going out to join the African

mission. I have never replaced him: he was the best friend I ever had."

"Master," interrupted Hannah, "where's that ribbon I bound round your sprained wrist this morning?"

"The ribbon? Oh! I took it off up-stairs and have forgotten it, so better proof cannot be that it is not needed: my arm is only stiff."

"You're very wilful, master."

"Those books, Kathie, are not of my gathering," the Curate said, pointing to the largest of the book-cases; "they were Arthur Crawford's: he left them to me when he decided on his vocation. I think he had brought together every poet of eminence since the flood. Do you like poetry?"

"Yes."

"What kind?"

"Best that which echoes my own feelings, or speaks of silent struggle patiently endured. There is a great deal of what is called poetry, which to me is full of sound and fury, signifying absolutely nothing. What is purely speculative

and obscure, I do not like: what appeals to my intellect only I do not like. Poetry, as I understand it, is a voice speaking to the secrets of the heart. Perhaps I am the best pleased when I meet with some blind wayward fancy of my own, which could never have shaped itself out of my mental chaos, fitted with apt words: they move as light over the formless darkness."

"I take that to be the popular feeling as regards poetry. Touch a passion, a sentiment—strike some nerve of past pleasure or past pain—and the heart-echo answers back with a thrill that stamps that verse as poetry to one section of humanity at least. For myself, I still like a measure that stirs my pulses like the sound of a trumpet; as in music I prefer a march to soft strains, and the clash of a military band, or the roll of your Minster organ, to the sweet flute or even the best trained human voice."

"Poetry, then, is individual, not universal?"

"It seems so: at least, taste is individual, and will never be reduced to one standard of perfection. To some it is given to see more than

others, as they are endowed with intellect, refined by cultivation, sharpened by experience, or purified by suffering. I have never thought deeply on the subject, however, so I merely offer these remarks as suggestions, not as opinions: you must sift them for yourself, Kathie."

"And, master, you know I always like what tells about them that go down to the sea in ships," interposed Hannah gravely. "There's St. Paul's shipwreck in the Acts, and some pieces of Job that speak of what I have been seeing all my life; and I understand and like them best of any story chapters that I read."

"And when you go about your work, I hear snatches of sea-songs—"

"Ay, master, I remember them since I was a bairn at home: perhaps I caught them up from my father—I don't rightly recollect; but they are my favourites."

"And they are poetical by association, chiefly if not wholly; for they are of the rudest ballad style."

"Nay, master, there's sound in them, and sense too, I'm sure!"

“I do not gainsay it, Hannah : surely there is. When I say, ‘poetical by association,’ I mean by the feelings they touch and rouse—by the old scenes and memories they call up. I will give you an illustration, Kathie. A week or two since, at an evening party, I met an Indian officer—a stalwart greybeard whom you would have supposed about as susceptible to tender emotion as a rhinoceros. There was a little girl present who sang rather prettily some weak, sentimental songs. There was one in particular—a sort of moan over a dead love; and the grim warrior stood listening, and twirling his moustache, and winking his eyes, in which were actual tears, while the child sang that bit of namby-pamby three times over to please him. The tune was poor, the words were foolish and maudlin; but they carried him back, no doubt, to some old story of his youth, and, perhaps, were to him the finest poetry he had ever heard.”

“Yes. My mother sings one or two border songs in the rudest north-country dialect: I remember once asking her why she did so, and

she said, because they reminded her of her home and her childhood. A servant in her father's house used to sing her to sleep with them when she was a little girl."

The rain ceased while we were still at luncheon, and when it was over I went immediately to the window, to see what prospect there was for my departure; being, if the truth must be told, very anxious to go away home, but rather doubtful of my reception when I should arrive there.

"I perceive you will be restless, Kathie, now, until you set off; so choose some books, and we will go," said Mr. Mayne. "As it is likely to turn out fine, I shall go to Marton, and by the sands will be your shortest way too."

I did as I was bid, and chose two books: Herbert's Poems, which had a quaint attractive look about them; and the "Faerie Queene"—an ancient brown volume.

The Curate glanced at their titles: "Strange choice! You will never read through Spenser," remarked he: "let me find you something newer."

He took from its shelf a poem entitled "Childe

Harold," saying that it was glorious. Glorious it was.

There was a continuation of the steep lane in which Mr. Mayne's cottage stood, down to the sea-shore ; and about a mile to the left lay Marton, Crofton being to the right ; therefore, on reaching the sands, I held out my hand and said, " Good-bye."

" It is to be 'good-bye' here, is it?" said Mr. Mayne. " Why should it? I have to go to Crofton to see the Doctor, and might as well bear you company."

" But you were going to Marton."

" I can go to Marton as I return : it is all the same."

" No, the tide will be up and the sands covered. It is rising now."

" There is the high road, my little friend."

" Good-bye. The high road is very far about. Go to Marton now."

" You want to be rid of me, Kathie : that is ungrateful. I was glad the storm had driven you to my fireside : I liked to see you there."

"Thank you, Mr. Mayne."

"I am going to Crofton now, Kathie."

"Master, you are very wilful," said I, laughing, and quoting Hannah's words.

"Both wilful and persistent, Kathie. Why do you call me master? Am I your master, child?"

He peered down into my face curiously; but I looked up and said, "By no means:" he was not to think it—at which he feigned surprise.

"No wonder Miss Palmer turned you out a failure: you have no veneration for authorities."

"Are you authorities?"

"I thought *Kathie* had faith in me," was the significant, low-spoken reply.

It made me quite silent, and filled my heart with a strange wild throb that threatened to undo all my morning's solemn thoughts and resolutions. It was quite a relief to me when we came to the steps in the sandhills by which we entered the village. We separated there; Mr. Mayne going to the Rectory, and I towards home.

"To-morrow is your lesson," said he as we shook hands.

“ Yes.” My *last* lesson, I thought to myself.

“ Where in the world have you been, Kathie ?” was my grandmother’s demand the moment I appeared.

I told her briefly how I had been caught in the rain, where I had taken shelter, and how I had been entertained. Miss Pompe was there making a call : she laughed much at my narrative.

“ You are an odd little creature,” said she ; “ you have queer, independent, boyish ways. I am sure I should not have ventured to stay luncheon with Mr. Mayne, though he is papa’s curate, and I have known him for years. People talk so.”

I put down my books on the table, and she came forward to see what they were.

“ Some of Arthur Crawford’s books !” was her rather surprised observation. “ Has Mr. Mayne lent them to you ? He prizes them very much.”

“ It was foolish in you to bring them, Kathie, when you are going home so soon,” interposed my grandmother.

“ I have leave to take them away with me.”

“ Oh, indeed !” cried Miss Pompe, “ you and the Curate seem to have struck up a friendship on platonic principles. I thought that style of thing was quite gone out of fashion. Did not you, Mrs. Marston ?”

I went away up-stairs, leaving them to the discussion of the question.

“ It has been pleasant to-day—very pleasant,” I thought to myself, as I stood for a few seconds by the open window, with Mr. Mayne’s flowers before me ;—“ too pleasant, and it must not be repeated ”

I dashed off my bonnet, bade all sweet delusions avaunt, and returned to the drawing-room to cool my imagination with the study of that beautiful and triumphant woman’s grace and wit.

XXIV.

That evening my aunt Aurelia was invited to a quiet family dinner at the Rectory ; and just as grandmamma, Miss Bootle, and I were sitting

down to tea in her absence, Mr. Mayne walked in. He was asked to stay ; and though he said he could not, for he had refused his rector's invitation two hours since, it ended by his taking a seat and abandoning himself to our society without any strong persuasion. Miss Bootle observed that as he had no business, either real or ostensible, at the Grange at that hour, it was very odd that he should have come if he meant to go away again directly. He looked slightly confused, and did not attempt any further explanation.

It was a very pleasant evening. My grandmother happened to be in one of her best moods, and Mr. Mayne was cheerful ; the lines of his usually grave face looked less deep, and his eyes were full of a genial, human content. I sat by the lamp, netting a purse of crimson silk and speaking but rarely, while he gave my grandmother some details of his early life. I remember he spoke of his mother with a tender and manly enthusiasm, and that I thought within myself, "What a power of loving there is in that man's heart !" And I—weak, presumptuous, insignificant

thing—dared to dream that he might pour it forth on me !

“ There is more genuine worth in the world than in gloomy, disappointed moments we are willing to admit,” said my grandmother, in answer to some allusion that the Curate made to an individual whose aid had formerly been of great service to him.

“ My own experience echoes that,” was his reply. “ I think, on the whole, it gives us back the reflection of our own faces, and that we find friends even as we merit them. It is hardly to be expected that the world—by which we mean that section of society whose suffrages we covet—should condescend to soothe down the surly spirit that abuses it. I have found mine a kindly world, though I have not been what is commonly called a successful man : my character appears to lack the popular element.”

“ You are young, and may look forward to a happy and honoured future.”

“ I do look forward, and hope yet to be of use in a more extensive sphere than this.”

“ You are ambitious, Mr. Mayne.”

I remembered of old my grandmother's idea of ambition—a statue of vapour, hovering over a deep pitfall, and luring by its insidious graces many high hearts to their ruin.

“ I trust mine is no unworthy ambition,” said the Curate; then added, with a glance towards me, “ What would our life be without its dreams and its hopes?”

The guilty blood dyed my face, and my grandmother remarked it.

“ You may well blush, Kathie: dreaming is half your existence,” said she. “ Still, it is the best to call things by their right names: imagination has misled far more than it has benefited. You need not expect life to be all sunshine.”

“ I need not, judging by what is gone of it; but even that would have been inexpressibly more dreary but for the fancies you despise,” said I, hastily and half bitterly. “ Perhaps it is a providential dispensation, grandmamma, that those who are to find little actual pleasure in their

existence should be able to escape from it, now and then, into a brilliant dream-land."

I felt Mr. Mayne's eye upon me after I had spoken, when, with my head bent down low over my work, I threaded the needle through the crimson loops. I wondered what he sought in my face: it had lost its childish pallor and the shadow of discontent, I knew; it was not beautiful, but youth and health had given it the tints of spring, and as much of grace and attraction as it was ever to possess. I did wish for one instant that I were beautiful—beauty is so sure a charm for love.

That night, when I laid my head on my pillow, whether I would or no, a soft hope nestled itself in my heart. In vain I bade it depart and carry its sweet delusion far from me; in vain I said the cold truth was stronger and better than a dream which would vanish at dawn: it stayed by me; it refused to be gone.

XXV.

Is it well to strangle our happy thoughts and hopes? Even if they die unrealized, they do us good; therefore, I say, let the vain, foolish things live out their hour. It is good to be loved, but it is paradise to love. If love bears a sting—was there not a serpent in Eden too? But First Love, looking out through guileless eyes, beholds only the sunshine of God's presence; and its deep calm, its passion-pure ecstasy, are worth an age of plodding, pulseless life. First Love is the golden key to the gate of happiness, which no counterfeit of baser metal can ever open. Many go away from that gate weeping, weary, sick of earth and its sordid passions; gazing back sadly at the shining portals whence for evermore they are outcast, and which the mists of Lethe will soon dim and tarnish. It is said that some there are to whom love is a myth, a beautiful delusion, talked of in stories, sung of in songs;

—some to whose eyes its eternal truth has never been revealed, who rank it with old poets' fables ; —some who, if they acknowledge it at all, say that it existed only in primitive times, when men talked face to face with angels, and the world was in its youth.

Do we never talk with angels now? never unawares entertain a heavenly visitant? Surely we do. Mercy and Charity still walk abroad, silent, but with visible foot-prints; and, too—let the callous or disappointed scoff at it as they will—there comes the sweep of Love's silvery wing, making low, tender music in young hearts, and vindicating earth from the charge that it is forsaken of the angels.

For me Love dawned as softly as a summer morning; waking up life in the calm of the early hours; growing swiftly to noontide heat; ripening in sweet drowsiness till the twilight of age crept greyly over it, and came the hush of night and the grave. It glorified my existence as the sun glorifies the long summer day; and surely such love as this is the dim, holy shadow of the lost

Eden. I shall have to tell of cloud—of mid-day storm, perhaps; but who thinks of them in the evening glow? As I come to this part of my story, it seems as if I ought to remember them no more.

I know this issue is not for all—not for many: there were fewer sceptics if it were often thus. To some, Love comes like a glittering beam cleaving its way through thunder-clouds; dazzling in its sudden light, half tearful though it be. A wild, passionate thrill that Love has — still the angel visitant descending into the heart, though it abide not: the rent clouds glide up again and blot out the sun, till the gloom is deep as eternal twilight. God help that soul in its loneliness, and God help those who through the livelong day see but the dull, leaden arch of a loveless life! The fiercest gust of passion that ever wrecked a soul were better than that dead torpor of the heart. Verily, to love and to suffer is better than to love not at all.

XXVI.

There is a certain feeling of sadness connected with the idea that we are going to do anything for the last time. My books being laid ready for my master, when he should come, and all my lessons carefully prepared, I placed myself near the school-room window to watch. Miss Bootle was not there; only Charlie, coiled round on the hearth-rug and fast asleep.

Four o'clock was the hour, and Mr. Mayne was always punctual; but on that day it had struck by the church and every clock in the village, and still he did not appear. The daylight began to fade, and I began to say, “If he should not come,” with a perfect sickness of pain: “If he should not come, I may never see him more.”

At last the gate of the garden swung open, as if flung back in haste and agitation, a quick tread passed below the window, and he came

up the stairs two or three steps at a time, and entered the room, when I still leant white and trembling against the side of the window.

His first words, spoken in a vexed tone, were, "Kathie, why did you not tell me yesterday that you were going away from Crofton?"

With one sweep of his hand he scattered the lesson-books, as I drew near the table to begin, and with the other held me, shaking and weeping as I was, there before him.

"You little reserved thing, why do you shut yourself up from me? You are glad to go, then? There is nobody at Crofton you love?"

A storm of passionate, childish sobs quite convulsed me; I wrenched myself out of his grasp, and dropping on my knees beside the table I hid my face upon it, and cried as if my heart would break.

"Kathie, my child, my darling!" said he deprecatingly: "listen to me, Kathie." He had put his arm round me and raised me from the floor; I felt myself drawn irresistibly to his breast; he lifted up my face and looked at me.

I struggled to be free: it was more than I could bear.

“If you wish to go—go!” he said mournfully, but at the same time his clasp grew closer. “Kathie, I cannot spare you—your place is in my heart: say you love me a little, my child.”

I was still and silent: hushed by the sense of great happiness that came to me then.

“Have you not one word for me, Kathie—not one?”

I raised my face to his, and he read his answer there.

“You belong to me: you are mine,” he said in a deep passionate tone; “mine now and ever! Kathie, you have felt that I loved you: could you have gone away from me coldly?”

“Oh, no!” It was easy to confess that now, and it cheered my heart to do it: lightened it of those phantom doubts and fears that seemed almost traitorous, since he had called me his.

He drew me gently to the window, and for a little space we were silent; but soon the spell was

broken up, and we began to talk: not in a sage or edifying way at all, but as egotistically as people in such circumstances always do. Felix told me of some new dawning worldly hopes—ambitious manhood's wild high hopes! What a discursive, subtle, wiling theme! and I entered into it, every nerve of my heart thrilling as I felt that I was privileged to share those hopes; to give him the help of a loving faith; to watch, to tremble, to exult with him. Oh, indeed, Kathie Brande was a happy girl on that blessed day when Felix Mayne gathered her in his arms and said he loved her! He told me that in his eyes I had the best beauty—youth, health, cheerfulness; and the best dower—spirit, energy, and fortitude. Then he spoke of the time when I should be his wife; when we should live together in one home, and have but one interest: of long summer rambles; of winter nights by the fireside: of all that, gathered together under one roof, and bound by one tie, is carried in our memory as *home*.

It all rises up before me so distinctly while I write:

the darkening school-room, the yellow sunset, the rising moon, and the trees all black and shadowy outside. I know not whether such temperaments as mine feel joy and pain more exquisitely than others do, but to hear Felix say those magical words, and to feel his eyes resting on me with love, was almost too much happiness. I had begun to know already that he was more than all the world to me; and that a glamour was rising up between my heart and my reason, that it was hard to see through clearly.

“When shall this sweet romance of ours become an everyday reality, Kathie: when will you be my wife indeed?” he asked gently. For a few seconds I was silent; then I made answer, “We must wait.”

“Wait!” he echoed impatiently.

The tears sprang to my eyes, but a touch from his lips arrested their fall. Old home-affections were not forgotten; but they stood back, yielding the first place to the great master-passion. Before me the brightest page in all life’s book lay open: I conned its lines lingeringly, without

any looking back at past chapters, or any fore-shadowings of what might be to happen, before death should turn over to the *finis* and shut up the book. All the sights and sounds of that hour wore themselves into a dream, which was to rise up in the dark days of far-off years with a tender and softened light. I was not sad then: there was not a tinge of melancholy in my feelings. I was not experienced yet in hours of patient hope, or years of vain waiting. I was only trustful and happy.

“Wait, Kathie?” said Felix again; “why wait? Our best days are these: why not make our way together? I want you to encourage me, and uphold me. Think of me when you are gone, with no companion on my hearth but Dean, and only an indefinite hope to cheer me.”

But I had another fireside in my mind’s eye, where I was even then expected—a fireside under the shadow of the old Minster: no brighter than his, but with harder toil and fewer hopes; and my place was there for years yet. What could I do?

what could I say? Still nothing but "We must wait."

"Kathie, I have found what I love; I want to take it to myself, and shelter it from every trouble but such as I can share!" was his impetuous reply. "And you answer me with 'Wait!' Are we to go our separate ways, and *some day*, no duties coming between, to be happy?"

He half withdrew his arm, as if rejecting such a compromise; but when I shrank away, he caught me back again, and asked almost fiercely if his love were so indifferent to me that I could leave him thus. The glistening happy tears in my eyes were answer enough. He returned to his first idea of the folly of waiting. I reminded him of the duties I owed at home.

"Who can require the sacrifice of you?" he passionately exclaimed: "what mother can ask a child to give up her best years to such work as yours will be?"

"Oh, Felix! *she* would not ask it," I replied, grieved and yet touched by his tone: "she would toil on to her dying day rather than stand

in the way of our happiness. Do not urge me, Felix: I have a duty which I must do. Could you expect a selfish daughter to make a good wife? I am so young, and I have done nothing for my mother yet. I *must* go to her for a time: I ought."

"You speak calmly, Kathie, and expect me to be convinced. And I want you, too: for you, and with you, I could do anything. Have you not pledged yourself to me?" he said gently and tenderly. He held me against his heart, and looked down into my eyes for an answer. I shook my head, and avoided his gaze. My sense of duty withstood this first appeal of passion. He loosed his arm, and put me away mournfully; but I did not stir to go: I could not. I longed to lay my head on his breast, and tell him I would do whatever he willed.

"My love then is nothing to you, Kathie! You are proud: you will not let me work for you," he added.

I was silent; but the hot tears swelled into my eyes at his injustice. I saw my future before

me—quiet and tranquilly happy, even through those half-bitter tears. There would be a round of small duties to do—duties that would prevent idle anxieties and foolish fears. My life looked like a stream flowing peacefully through meadow lands; no swift currents, no shallows or dangerous quicksands showed in its course: now and then there were inflowings from another river—gushing, sparkling, making sunny eddies where the waters met—then on they glided again with gentle ripple. Perhaps there might come a shadow across that stream; but shadows would not stop its tide: it might wind deviously through long, long miles; it might be skirted by dusty roads where Hope would lag, and Patience grow foot-sore; but I saw a point where the two rivers mingled, where rose a fair city looking seawards; thence the deep still waves flowed on into strange lands beyond my ken—beautiful lands where the sunshine was never dimmed, or the flowers stricken with frost or blight. I glanced up from my vision to find his reproachful eyes watching the flickering changes on my face.

"True-hearted, trusting little Kathie!" he exclaimed, drawing me back fondly to his side. "I cannot, looking into your face, doubt: you are a faithful soul. I don't know whether this guileless child's heart of yours is not too precious a boon for me: it *is* mine, Kathie?"

"Oh, Felix! I am so proud that you love me!"

"Let me have you to myself while I can, Kathie: do not be in haste to be gone. Here is a little ring; promise me to wear it until I exchange it for another. I wish that day were nearer at hand."

His arm was round me as he spoke; he must have felt how wildly my heart beat. It was pleading for him eagerly, passionately. But duty had a clear voice that sounded warningly above that sweet petition.

"Felix, you must be on my side," I said: "a few years will soon slip away.

He kissed me, and said it was a harder task than I knew, to be patient.

"I hoped Kathie would be plastic as fine clay

in my hands; but what a sturdy little will she opposes to mine! I do not love to be thwarted, my child: it is a new lesson you want to teach me, and I am not an apt scholar."

I considered that subject disposed of, and would not return to it.

"Felix, I shall keep this ring always, and wear it always: even if any change should come, I shall wear it in memory of what has been."

"Tush, darling, no forebodings! Changes cannot come. I trust you, Kathie, and you have faith in me; have you not?"

"Perfect faith."

"Then it is enough. Kathie, are you happy now?"

"Yes, Felix."

"Happier than you were an hour ago?"

"I was not sure then that you loved me."

He bent down till his lips touched my brow. At that instant the school-room door opened, and grandmamma entered. I immediately made my escape to my own room, leaving Mr. Mayne to explain to her what she undoubtedly had seen.

I might have been there, perhaps, half an hour alone, when I heard my kinswoman's still firm, deliberate step approaching. She came in, sat down, and looked at me not unkindly.

"Well, child," she began, "a pretty coil of mischief you have brought us all into! Your coming to Crofton has been an unlucky business altogether. There, don't cry! it cannot be helped now, and we must make the best of it," and she sighed as if very bad were the best. "So you and Mr. Mayne are engaged?" in a satirical tone. "Oh, Kathie! you are a foolish, headstrong girl! If you would have listened to Mr. Longstaff's proposal—you need not flash out—it would have been sensible; but this engagement is ridiculous. Mr. Mayne is too poor to marry; and you little know what a drag, what a galling fetter you may become to that ambitious man. He loves you, but that will not satisfy him: be warned in time."

I shook my head.

"Then you had better marry at once, and plod through life together. He might turn school-

master, and then with his curacy he would be able to keep you, in a mean sort of way. But if in poverty and obscurity the time should come when he murmurs at his position, remember that, but for your selfishness, it need not have been."

"Grandmamma," said I, "we intend to wait."

"You will have enough of waiting!" she exclaimed tartly. "Kathie, I have seen so much of long engagements and long estrangements, that I am sick of the very name of them! You promise to marry, neither of you having the slightest idea when; trusting to Time and Providence to find you the ways and means. You are going to buy your experience dearly; and a good many tears you are likely to pay for it. There, get away: it is of no use to talk to you!"

As I went, a sentence that I had read a few days before in the works of a man wiser in words than in deeds recurred to me: "Love troubleth men's fortunes, and maketh a man that

he can by no means be true to his own ends." Its wisdom did not approve itself to me, and I turned from it resolutely.

At the foot of the stairs I met Aunt Aurelia: she kissed me, and I saw an unusual glitter in her eyes as she said, "Be faithful, Kathie, and whatever betide you will have some happiness. He is in there, waiting for you."

She pointed to the drawing-room which she had just left, and I went in.

Felix sprang forward and took my two hands in his. "We have been lectured, Kathie; but you are on my side, and nothing can come between us," said he gaily.

"Grandmamma is not implacable—not very, at least," responded I.

Miss Bootle entered in her hastiest and most expansive mood, and wept over us; crying at intervals that nobody knew how delighted she was, for she had predicted it in confidence to Charlie from the very beginning. We all passed that evening together, and it went over without one hiss or one sarcasm from grandmamma.

So ended the day when my tide of life was at flood. The ebbing waves left me some relics of wreck to count and bury away in the dead of the night. There were times in which I could only see the golden sparkle on their crests, when a stray dream lit on me, and wooed me into the Past, only too glad to follow its beck; but the glory of that day faded never—the memory of my great happiness stayed by me through all.

XXVII.

Before noon of the next day, Mr. Mayne was down at the Grange, and my grandmother received him with amity. She had said to me not long before, “I do not see where your witchery lies, Kathie; you are but a fragile bit of a girl. It is a marvel to me what two clever men like Mr. Longstaff and Mr. Mayne have found in you to daze their understandings. They are dazed, you know: they do not see you with the eyes of the flesh.”

I knew she thought me honoured beyond my deserts, and so I was ; but I felt older and more dignified than I had done before the glamour was achieved.

Mr. Mayne would have me walk to Marton with him, and return up the lane to see Hannah—an excursion which lasted some two hours.

In coming down the Rectory lane on our return we saw young Reginald in the road, and heard him swearing most energetically at his groom for some neglect concerning the horse which the man held ready for him to mount. We walked slowly, in hopes that the wrathful young gentleman would take himself away ; but, having disposed of the groom, whom he did not dare to strike, he turned round, and proceeded to vent his rage on a fine dog which had been jumping up to him for some moments to attract his attention : he lashed the poor animal most savagely, while, with a pitiful, deprecating whine, it dragged itself to his feet and crouched there humbly.

“ You ’ll spoil that dog, Mr. Reginald,” remonstrated the groom.

“ Who cares if I do ? Isn’t he my own ? ” and again the whip came down on the tortured beast.

Felix Mayne sprang away from my side. I cannot exactly describe how it was done, but the next minute the young man was disarmed of his whip, and standing red with rage and confusion at being detected in his brutal cruelty. Felix seemed to say a few bitter, contemptuous words, as he tossed back the whip, and then Mr. Reginald immediately mounted his horse, and galloped off.

“ Young Pompe was six months under my care,” said Felix, as he joined me : “ I could do nothing with him. He has what I call a bad nature—cruel, cowardly, vain. Many sore hearts he will make before his course is run.”

The hot spark did not leave Felix’s eyes for a long while after. It made me remember what Hannah had said about his passionateness. I liked it in him. Cruelty to dumb creatures always makes my own blood boil furiously : I detest it and loathe it.

When we came back, and were loitering side by side across the lawn towards the house, I saw

Milicent Pompe at the drawing-room window. I know not why, but the sight of her face just then gave me a shock of pain and almost of terror. It looked white, but suffused; and the smile she gave us as we passed was a mere spasmodic contortion. She met us, however, with great gaiety of manner, and rattled on in her usual style of conversation for about twenty minutes. When she took leave, we all strolled out into the garden together: being a little apart from the rest, she whispered, "I hope you may be happy, Kathie Brande;" but she kept her hands folded in her mantle when she said good-bye, and, as I left Crofton three days after, I did not see her again. I felt as if I were charged with some guilt against her.

My aunt Aurelia went to pass the evening at the Rectory, and Miss Bootle was at Miss Conolly's; so grandmamma and I were left to ourselves. She took this opportunity of telling me some passages from her family history, already heard in part from the companion. My aunt Aurelia—a warm-hearted, impetuous girl—had

formed an attachment, perhaps more natural than prudent. This, by her mother's exertions, was broken off; and she was driven into a marriage with a gentleman of large wealth, but past middle age. She was frivolous and capricious; he was harsh and overbearing: domestic discord resulted, and they separated by mutual consent. Mr. Marston died shortly after, leaving her a considerable property, providing she did not marry again: if she did, she forfeited all. This was the secret of her contradictory character.

Poor, proud grandmamma! hers was a lonely, uncheered life—a prey to remorse often; conscious that her son had died unforgiven, and that her daughter bore about in her heart an unspoken reproach for her wasted happiness. Much more truly happy had my mother been with her large family, her poverty, and her many cares. To her, disappointments came with less bitterness: for they were met and borne with Christian fortitude and Christian faith. Hers was the finer, keener, truer perception between right and wrong. There was no mist of prejudice, no warping

expediency, to blind her to what was just ; no likelihood that she would sacrifice her children for fear of the world. There might be sore trouble for her, and sore disappointment ; but not life-long anger, or life-long vain regret.

XXVIII.

My visit to Crofton came to an end, and I left it in the morning grey of the last day in October, to meet the coach at Loughboro. Mr. Mayne met me walking with Sharpe, and would accompany us. He carried in his hand the little bird-cage which I had seen with the bullfinch in it at the cottage ; and this, I understood, was a present for me. He had also caused to be sent to the coach-office a parcel of books for my edification, and several pots containing plants which had been duly cherished by Hannah. My baggage altogether was of a very miscellaneous character, and perhaps it might have been objected to had not both guard and coachman been handsomely

fee'd before starting. When I was all comfortably packed, with the inside of the coach entirely to myself, Mr. Mayne looked in upon me, and said, "Kathie, I will see you at Christmas;" and before I had time to recover from the surprise of this intelligence, I was whirled away down Loughboro town street, and was mounting the steep hill to the moor. For a mile or two, I thought of nothing but what I left behind; but soon came a rush of pleasant home anticipations. This was another of my days which deserves to be marked with a white stone.

Stephen was waiting to meet me at the inn where the coach stayed in Eversley. We scarcely knew each other, both were so grown and altered; but at the first word the strangeness disappeared.

"Why, Kathie, you look as fresh as a daisy!" cried Stephen pleasantly; "you have grown quite pretty, I declare! What have you been doing to yourself?"

I laughed, and said I did not know, but was much obliged for the compliment.

"It won't do to call you 'moody Kathie' any

more," added he; and indeed I had lost my claim to that title.

I scarcely felt the ground under my feet as we set off to walk homewards. It was quite dark, and the lamps were lighted in the narrow, old-fashioned streets; but at every step we came on some familiar place; either a queer pointed gable, or an old archway, or a window encroaching on the pavement. It was impossible to talk; I could only feel and remember. As we caught sight of the Minster, I stopped to look up for an instant at the dim, night-veiled towers: at that moment out rang a joyous peal that made my heart echo again. The foolish tears were even in my eyes. Five minutes more brought us to Percie Court.

It was worth while to go from home, if only for the pleasure of coming back again. Jean and Isabel were on the watch in the stone hall; their cry of welcome brought my mother through the red door, and I was clasped close in her kind arms, and kissed over and over again in an April mood of tears and smiles. Ann was at the stairs-foot, with a toasting-fork over her shoulder (she

always bore some insignia of her office): she uttered an exclamation that it could not be Kathie *surely*, and rushed into the kitchen with her apron thrown over her head. Then we went up-stairs, my mother holding me at one side, and Jean hanging on at the other; with Isabel carrying the candle in front and turning round at every two or three steps to see that we were following. Being come into the west parlour, Stephen drew me to the fire to take another observation, bestowed on me a sonorous fraternal embrace, and asked if I should care much for his going to the bells. My mother thought that at his age, and going to college so soon as he was, he might find better employment; however, with a half rueful, half mischievous look at me, he started off, without scarcely giving me time to see what a handsome, manly lad he had become.

We had tea soon; and after it, all gathered round the fire for a long talk. There was not any change in my mother's face: perhaps her hair was a shade greyer; but her skin was as smooth, and her eyes were as clear as ever. The

little ones were, however, almost as much changed as I was. Isabel, now twelve years old, was a slim, graceful young thing, with a promise of exquisite beauty. As she sat in the fire-shine, her face slightly flushed with excitement, her long, waved hair hanging loose on her shoulders, and her singular eyes beaming like stars from beneath her arched brows, I thought that never anything more picturesquely lovely could be seen in this wide world.

Jean, a year younger, had a little peaceful, patient countenance, very frank and intelligent. She had a kind of beauty too, but was a very pale floweret beside our sister Isabel.

How much of the pleasantness sprang from my own heart, I cannot tell; but certainly the parlour looked brighter and more cheerful than it had ever done in my early, colourless days. The old furniture had been polished up, and new chintz covers and curtains replaced the faded crimson cloth; a flower-stand filled one of the windows, and already my bird-cage was exalted to a nail above it. My father's chair was drawn out from

its recess, and the great book-case was all rearranged; the hideous Chinese figures on the mantel-piece had given way to three tall, elegantly moulded vases of glass, in which Isabel and Jean had put some late-blooming flowers and laurel. Altogether the old room seemed to wear a smile on its familiar face, such as it had never worn before.

To mark the occasion of my return, the little ones sat up till eight o'clock; when they were gone, I told my mother of my engagement to Mr. Mayne. She asked few questions, but was entirely satisfied with what I told her: if I had not known her manner so well, I might have thought she received the news of my happiness too calmly; but the long strain in her arms, and the "God bless you, my Kathie!" which she murmured with her good-night kiss, assured me that her heart-sympathy was deep as a mother's should be. She would speak of it more hereafter.

Oh, my little closet-chamber! what happy prayers and visions did you witness that night.

I was at home where everybody loved me; where labour would be pleasure, being turned into stepping-stones to a higher, warmer love. Since I had left that dim, quiet room—not quieter or dimmer in its perpetual shadow than I had been—what vital change was there wrought in me! All my young anxieties, all my rebellings against Fortune, who had given me a lot amongst the workers of humanity—my vague aspirations to be something greater and better than I was—were put to rest. Often had I stood in that narrow window, when the dawn of summer morning was gilding the Minster towers, and thought in my faithlessness — “There can no light come down to me; I shall always stand in the shade: there will be no vividness in my existence; it will be all twilight.” Yet already through the mist had broken the mid-day sun; under its influence were budding better feelings: I felt rich in happiness, for my heart dilated from its immaturity and coldness into full strength. Kneeling at the window, whence I could catch a glimpse of heaven, I realized the change most

distinctly. This place had heard my childish sobs of pain—my later visions murmured to myself; on this deep ledge had I often sat, with knees for desk, and pencil in hand, scribbling down the puerile fancies of my girlhood—fancies that I was ashamed for anyone to know, and which were hid away in a little cupboard in the wainscot with a shabby doll and a few battered toys, that some lingering fondness induced me to preserve from the destructive fingers of the little ones.

Often during the night I awoke, and rose up to look out at the Minster to assure myself that I was not in a dream; and in the morning when, before any of the others, I was down in the west parlour, I amazed Ann by crying aloud, "It is true then! I am really at home!" Yes; there were the poplars overtopping the garden wall, there was the dingy slip of ground with its smoky shrubs, the mossy terrace steps, and the range of unhappy flower-pots. My bird came chirping to the side of its cage for its accustomed caress, and we had a little foolish

talk together about somebody who had been kind to both of us; which mystified Ann to that extent that she observed to my mother, "Miss Kathie was well nigh daft with joy at getting back home again."

XXIX.

That day brought a considerable burden of serious talk with it. In the first place, my aunt Aurelia had charged me with a proposal to my mother for the adoption of Isabel. The child's eyes sparkled with irrepressible glee when she heard it; she sprang up, and danced round the room, singing a wild street ballad, and clapping her little hands delightedly. My mother looked at her sadly and gravely, and bade me write a decided negative.

"I cannot consent to give up any more of my children: your sufferings have been a warning to me," she said resolutely.

Isabel stood for a minute quite disconcerted,

then she gave way to one of her most outrageous bursts of passion ; stamping, crying, dashing herself on the floor like an insane thing. Any word of reason only seemed to increase her fury : she vowed that she hated us all, and she hated her home, and she wished she were dead. My mother grew white, but made no sign of retracting her determination ; instead, she bade me write the letter, and get it done with ; upon which Isabel dashed away up-stairs to the garret, and fastened herself in. To her violent mood succeeded several days of resentful sullenness : she would speak to nobody, not even to Jean, who exerted all her little arts of soothing and affection. My mother said she must be let alone ; the fit would wear off : to notice it only strengthened her obstinate anger. It passed, at length, in a burst of tearful repentance ; and the subject of contention seemed to have been finally laid aside, and forgotten.

My mother was at this time very full of anxiety about Stephen. The examinations for the scholarship had been going forward, but the decision

was still pending. She thought Stephen's success certain, and was reposing in this belief so implicitly, that I had not the heart to disturb it by suggestions to the contrary: indeed, I ended by being as certain as she was. When I spoke to Stephen himself about it, and asked him how he felt, he replied impatiently, "Oh! confound the scholarship! I'm sick of hearing about it. You know, Kathie, I'm safe to win, for there is only Francis Maynard to care about, and he is but a slow, plodding fellow: I'm not afraid of *him*."

And my brother's confidence in himself engendered a like confidence in me. This scholarship was fifty pounds a year for three years; and no wonder my mother looked to it as a material help during Stephen's time at college.

Our third subject of grave discussion was my employment at home. It had been several times talked about at Crofton, and my grandmother had suggested that I should take a few little girls of the better class to instruct in the elementary branches of education, with Isabel and Jean.

For anything else I was unfitted; and not quite free from nervousness, even as regarded the teaching of young children: I knew so little myself. My mother approved the plan, and encouraged me by citing the many people in the Minster Close who, having known and respected my father, would be glad to extend a helping hand to his children. It was finally arranged that after Christmas I should begin; and in the interim I was so fortunate as to obtain the promise of seven little girls, all under ten years of age. This success set me free from all present anxieties; for, to keep my school select, the parents agreed amongst themselves that I should be more liberally paid than was usual; and, no doubt, as I obtained experience, I should increase my number. It must be confessed I thought my prospects very favourable.

When I communicated the tidings in a letter to Mr. Mayne, he expressed himself disappointed. "I had hoped nobody would have you but myself," he wrote.

XXX.

One evening about a fortnight after my return, when Stephen was away at the Minster, and the little ones were in bed, there came to our door a knock—a loud, authoritative knock. Expectant of good news as we daily were, every unusual sound brought the scholarship to mind.

A heavy foot mounted the stairs, preceded by Ann's quick, running step. "Please, ma'am, a gentleman wants to speak to you," was the ex-Greycoat-girl's style of announcement; and in walked a tall, grey-headed man, with a lank, stooping figure—Mr. Withers, of the Grammar School.

He entered, swinging his long arms, and swaying his person backwards and forwards in a series of embarrassed bows, rubbing up his grizzled hair, coughing, and indulging in various other nervous eccentricities. His countenance forbade us to hope that he was the messenger

of pleasant tidings: naturally he was a pale man, but now he looked flushed and annoyed. Three several chairs did he try before he settled; and then all the information he appeared to have to communicate was that we should be surprised to see him—a fact of such vast importance, that he stated it four times, and then changed his seat again. My mother had put on her quietest and most resolute face; she looked neither agitated nor impatient: I was on thorns.

Mr. Withers next told us it was a fine day (we could hear the rain pattering on the glass); then that it was of no use to beat about the bush; and, finally, it was what he always feared.

Still the story did not come; so I spoke. "Stephen has not won the scholarship, Mr. Withers?" I said interrogatively.

"You are right, my dear young lady, he has not; and it is his own fault entirely," replied the master, speaking like a sane person, and looking immensely relieved. "There is not another lad in the school with his abilities; but he is too indolent and pleasure-loving by half. It is the

old fable of the hare and the tortoise, Mrs. Brande."

My mother suppressed a sigh, and said something about its being a pity and a disappointment. "Not that his failure in this instance need change his ultimate destination," she added calmly; "I have provided against such a contingency. Perhaps it may have the effect of sobering him for the future."

"There is no harm in the lad," said Mr. Withers cheerfully; "I have a feeling for him for my friend Brande's sake: he has decidedly more than common ability, but he is rather too self-confident. I agree with you in thinking this may give him a check. He is a fine youth; and I assure you, ma'am, I feel more than a common interest in him. Good-evening, Miss Brande; I wish you a very good evening, ma'am."

He shook hands with my mother, and bowed himself out with almost as many graces as he had bowed himself in. After he was gone, my mother quietly resumed her work. I could not:

I felt ready to cry for poor Stephen's mortification and disappointment.

"Do not be distressed, Kathie," said my mother, but with a tremble in her own voice notwithstanding; "Stephen takes nothing in earnest: I should not be surprised if he made a jest of this. Listen! he is coming in now: is not that his foot?"

And so, indeed, it was, taking half a dozen of the shallow steps at a time, as if all life were a mere feather-weight; he was whistling, too, as blithely as ever, and his countenance looked as free from trouble as it always did. We received him very quietly: pity and condolence were quite uncalled for.

"Well, mother, you have had Mr. Withers about the scholarship?" said he carelessly; "Maynard won. The decision was announced this afternoon."

"So we understand, Stephen. It is a disappointment, my boy, to all of us, I am sure."

"Yes, mother, but I suspect there has been

favouritism in the case: Maynard is old Withers's nephew, you know."

My mother did not agree to this supposition, much as it might have flattered Stephen and comforted herself.

"Well, I am glad it is over and off our minds; mine feels all the lighter for it," he added with a toss of his beautiful head as he sauntered towards the door.

I followed him out, at a sign he made; for I saw he wanted to say something more.

"Kathie, mother does not seem to mind; I was afraid she would be in a terrible taking," he whispered.

"It is not her way to say much, Stephen, but she is grievously sorry," was my answer.

"I have been an idle dog, and given her lots of trouble," said he in a soberer tone; "but I'll mend, Kathie—see if I don't! After to-night I'll give up the Minster bells and the river, and study like a regular sap: I'll be as hard-working as Maynard; and then I shall soon distance him out and out."

I had not much faith in poor Stephen's good resolutions: he procrastinated always; and his to-morrows of amendment never came. He had little practical energy: his character possessed neither bone nor muscle; but was always soft, plastic, and yielding. It never seemed to me as if he were making one conscientious effort to overcome his natural indolence. He loved society, and he loved pleasure, and was possessed of most of those dangerous qualities that make men acceptable in the one, and slaves to the other: in short, he was gifted with all those endowments which usually distinguish the class of people of whom friends say in their adversity, "They were nobody's enemies but their own"—a false conclusion, very, very often; since few are so isolated as to stand alone in their ruin.

The immediate consequence of the disappointment about the scholarship, was the reversal of my mother's determination respecting Isabel. The child had been promised lessons in music, for which she showed a remarkable talent, conditionally on Stephen's gaining it: my mother

was now obliged to explain to her that the expense would be inconvenient; and this brought on another of those frantic outbreaks of temper which were the dread of the whole house.

During the sullen period that followed, my aunt Aurelia arrived in Eversley, and stayed at "The George," on her way to London. We saw her several times; and Isabel made all her grievances loudly known. My aunt sympathized with her; and strenuously combated all my mother's arguments and denials. The result was a reluctant consent to the child's leaving us, which quite intoxicated her with delight; and, remembering how eager I myself had been for change, I scarcely wondered at it. From the time it was decided that she should go, my mother could scarcely bear to let anyone touch her but herself. I recollect on the last night she kept her close at her side; and when she was put to bed, she curled her hair, and loitered tenderly over every stage of her undressing: more than once her lips were pressed to the little white shoulders and dimpled arms, while Isabel looked wonderingly

at her, as if with a dim perception of being pained by so much love. My mother's presentiments for her child were not happy ones, but she held her peace.

My aunt remained in Eversley a week, during which interval she often had Isabel with her. The innocent young creature did not intend to be selfish or unfeeling; but many times during those few days I saw my mother's eyes filled with tears as Isabel ran out into the court in thoughtless haste, crying that the parlour was dull, and she wished her aunt were ready to go away.

I shall never get out of my mind's eye the look of the pretty thing the morning she left us. She was all in haste to be gone; and her little impetuous ways, as she danced about and brought the colour into her cheeks, made her look bright as a vision. She shed no tears at saying "Good-bye;" and her face, at the last moment, beamed upon us from from the carriage window in its merriest guise.

Thus this bird took flight from the parent

nest with eager, untried wing! What storms were to beat those slender pinions? what cruel winds to beset the wanderer? My mother prayed that night that the Father of the fatherless would temper them to the nestling's weakness.

XXXI.

The house seemed very still after Isabel was gone. My mother missed her blithe carol, and Jean was dull for want of her playmate; but after a few weeks, things fell into their new routine, and her empty place seemed no longer strange. We heard from her of her safe arrival in London, of our aunt's pretty house, and of the teachers who were to transform her into a clever little lady. She seemed perfectly happy in the change, and I think my mother's anxieties lessened. Aunt Aurelia, we were persuaded, would be very kind to her, as it was her nature to be kind to everything; and the child's own self-will would protect

her from the heavy restraints which had formerly been so injurious to me.

Christmas-time was now approaching. The ground was hard as iron with a long frost; the river was frozen, and the Barbican moss was covered with skaters. Jean and I had walked to a country friend's for some holly to deck the west parlour, and were returning through the South-gate, laden with spoils, when Mr. Withers overtook us. He wanted to speak to me about his three little motherless girls—could they be received at my school? Polly was twelve, and the others younger. I was delighted, and said I should be most glad to have them. The arrangement was made in five minutes, for the master was not a man of many words. Jean whispered this was good Christmas news for my mother, and could not refrain from capering as we went up the steep stone steps to the walls; preferring to return home that way rather than to carry our bunches of holly through the town.

There was a pale, winterly sun shining on the roofs of the houses, and on the Minster; and a

clear, frosty, healthful breath in the air, that pinched our cheeks till they were rosy red. I felt so happy and free from anxiety, that I might have imitated little Jean's fashion of testifying her joy, if I had not been so burdened. As it was, I only hummed the burden of a Christmas-carol, which faintly echoed the music in my heart.

We did not walk fast, so that by the time we came to the steps where the ferry-boat was usually moored to convey passengers across the river, the sunshine had given place to dusk. The river was now passable on foot ; so we made our way, amongst skaters and sliders, to the further side. Stephen and several of his schoolfellows were there, young Maynard amongst the rest. He came up and spoke to Jean, offering to carry her holly ; but she rejected the proposal quite tartly, and quickened her pace to escape up the street.

“ If he had not beaten Stephen, Bella would be with us now,” said she in pettish explanation. “ I don't like Francis Maynard half as much as I did, Kathie.”

We can rarely afford to be just where we love.

When we reached home, my mother was called upon to rejoice with us over the three pupils that were added to my list ; and this she did by saying she was always sure her little Kathie would make herself friends. Jean and I then threw off our bonnets and cloaks, and, having summoned Ann to bring the steps, proceeded to decorate the room. We made festoons to garland my father's book-case, filled the chimney-glasses with sprays begemmed with scarlet berries, and, the bare flowers being removed from the stand, wreathed it over with green. Then I mounted the steps, to garnish the old mirror between the windows, and as much as possible to hide its unsightly frame. I was singing now with all my heart, and Jean's sweet little voice chimed in. My mother sat by the fireplace, where a great Yule log was blazing, admiring our handiwork and occasionally putting in a word of advice.

Though Ann had not brought in candles, the room was full of warmth and cheerful light. The black old wainscot, with its quaint carvings, shone

again ; and the crimson furniture looked homely and appropriate. I remember thinking it quite picturesque and pretty in its Yule-tide garnishing. There I was, mounted aloft, holding in my hand a splendid branch, which I wished to fix in the arched top of the glass, my hair all in wild disorder, and my cheeks crimson with the air and exertion of our walk, when the door opened, and some one came in. Thinking it was Stephen, I cried out to him to come and help me ; but, Jean's song ceasing suddenly, I turned round, and saw, to my delight, a tall, cloaked figure standing just within the room. It was Mr. Mayne !

I sprang down with an exclamation of pleasure, and in the irrepressible joy of the moment he caught me in his arms and kissed me. This was quite presentation enough to my mother : she came forward and gave him a warm reception ; and Jean shyly accepted his overtures of friendship. She confided to me afterwards that he was so tall, and so serious in the face, that she was half afraid of him, and wondered a little how I dared to love him.

That evening we all spent together in the old parlour. My happiness was full when I saw how completely my mother and Felix agreed, and how sincere and deep were the respect and admiration each conceived for the other's character. But I had never doubted that it would be so.

XXXII.

There come now a few white days in my memory: nothing intermeddled with their joy. The morrow of Mr. Mayne's arrival was Christmas Eve. We passed the morning in the Minster: a bitterly cold morning it was, with a frosty sunlight shining through the windows, and throwing jewelled arabesques of colour on the pillars and pavement. Each trivial incident of this time has burnt itself deep into my memory, and I love to recall the picture in its vivid minuteness. Outside in the Close all was white, hard, and clear; no wind stirred; but the black, bare poplars swayed slowly to and fro, and through

the towers went a low, plaintive sigh, as if some breeze had lost its way amongst the bells, and were moaning to get out.

The great south door stood wide, and a few strangers came strolling in, and went roaming to and fro the aisles with stealthy steps, prying behind old monuments, and peering through iron gates, to the small satisfaction of their curiosity. Presently Mr. Withers advanced down the nave, with lurching gait, and umbrella in hand; with which, notwithstanding the place and his profession, he was playing an imaginary but very energetic game of cricket. Then the Dean entered, in white surplice, carrying his cap in his hands behind him: his fine countenance was overcast as with the shadow of recent trouble; but he mechanically bent his grand white head in return to the reverent salutes of the people. Next came the scurry of a troop of little boys, who had been improving the time with marbles on the Minster steps to the last moment: they all had short white gowns, crimped frills, and shiny faces; and were endowed with that superabundance of spirits

which seems to be a providential dispensation to keep chorister boys warm. Then followed the bustling rush of three minor canons, all late, all corpulent, and all short of breath. They disappeared through a little low door for a few seconds, whence they issued forth fully robed, with glowing countenances and great decorum: a man bearing a silver poker marshalled them to their respective places, and the service commenced.

The congregation scarcely numbered two score souls. The strangers settled down for a few restless minutes, and went out again into the side-aisle to read the Latin inscriptions on the tablets until the music began, when they returned, or hung about the doors of the choir to listen. The prayers were almost inaudible.

In about an hour the service was concluded, and away flashed the chorister-boys, pulling their white gowns over their heads, slyly hitting each other, and jumping on the pavement to warm their frozen feet; while the Dean, the minor canons, and the canon major departed in a group,

and left the old Minster for a few hours to the sunshine, the vergers, and the strangers.

While Felix and I were hesitating whether we should go or stay, a verger came up to us, recognised the cloth by a deferential bow, and asked if we wished to see over the building; to which we assented. With a few other individuals, we followed in procession, listening to stories and descriptions run one into another like badly-struck colours; went down into crypts—dark, damp, mouldy; glanced over monuments of kings, archbishops, bishops, and other great men of the earth; heard of Oliver Cromwell's melting down silver images, and leaving the niches empty; saw the pious relics and ancient curiosities in a little dark room like a vault; visited the beautiful Chapter-house, and so round about and back again until we came to the place whence we had started.

Our guide then suggested that it was a clear day to go to the top of the great tower. All the other people declined, with a shiver; but Felix and I accepted the proposition, and, being led to a

narrow door, were ushered into twilight at the foot of a spiral stair. Then up—up more than three hundred steps, for the most part in gloom, sometimes in total darkness. At the narrow loop-holes we paused to take breath an instant; then forward again, till at length we emerged on the sloping, battlemented roof.

Here we were alone : the hum of men—every sound—lost. We might have been in a city of the dead, for any voice that came up to our ears. The air was very keen, and even the sunshine had an icy gleam on the white stone, all unlike the glow of summer. For miles and miles away, the fields lay grey and bare, the woods showed black in their nakedness, and the river—white as a silver ribbon rolled loosely over the landscape—was lost in mist towards the sea. Northward and westward stretched lines of low hills, covered with unmelted snows; where the snows would lie until the spring dawned on their chill slopes.

We stayed and talked together a little while—talked of our future. Who does not? For whom is the present so all-sufficing, as that

imagination cannot woo them to dwell on the mysterious unknown and unseen?—Then down again into the 'chastened light of the long aisles, with quiet, hopeful thoughts for guides.

In the afternoon we were at the Minster again, to hear the Christmas Eve anthem. We sat up near the altar, where the music came rolling like billows of sound through the hollow roof. Looking upwards, we could see nothing but darkness: pillars, arches, gemmed and storied windows, all melted into the solemn gloom. The singers' voices came as from a long way off; sweet, rejoicing, triumphant, like those voices of the heavenly host which, centuries ago, were heard by the shepherds of Bethlehem on the midnight hills of Judea.

That evening, when we were all of us together in the west parlour, Felix brought out a map of India, upon which the missionary stations were marked down. Stephen and he pored over it together for some time, the rest of us watching.

"It is a fine field for our labour," said Felix gravely.

“ Yes,” returned my brother, “ for men like you, who are at heart as much soldier as priest, and who would die in the cause with pride and pleasure.”

“ Kathie, would you go ? ” asked Felix.

My glance at my mother and Jean and Stephen said, “ And leave all these ! ”

Forthwith the map was folded up, and restored to its case. “ I shall find my work at home,” replied he contentedly.

There was a great fall of snow that night ; and when the clanging bells awoke us to the Christmas morning, it was to look out on white streets, and snowy billows drifted up against the Minster buttresses, and lying thick on every ledge and moulding, and grotesque carving. The sky above was pale blue, and the sun shone frostily over the winter mantle in the Close. We all went to St. Mark’s church, and showed Felix my father’s grave under the low wall. It struck me as less dreary and neglected with its pure covering than it had ever done before ; and perhaps the same thought came into my mother’s mind, for she turned

round and said to me, "Kathie, when I die, remember, I wish to be buried by your father."

The time of Mr. Mayne's stay with us was marked by no events. It formed one of those pleasant, homely pictures, which Memory loves to hang in her gallery, and often to loiter before in after days : a fireside study, full of tender touches and delicate shades ; trivial, perhaps, and ineffective to others ; but to the owner precious in its quaint simplicity, and most dear in its quiet truth. I showed him all the old town ; made him penetrate with me into the ancient courts of Friargate and the Barbican, where we disinterred many architectural remains, unobserved till then amidst the squalor and poverty that herded amongst them. I led him round as much of the walls as remained, and showed him our walks, that he might know my favourite haunts as well as I knew his at Crofton.

On the morning before he left us, we went down to the river-side : it was a cold thaw, very chill and very dreary ; but it did not affect us. The sky was heavy and low ; and the river,

being very full, flowed with an eddying current, whirling on its surface bits of stick and straw. The fields were dead green; the sedges on the banks all torn and brown; the gaunt, naked boughs of the trees like black pencil lines on a dull grey ground. We had come out there to be alone: that we might have the cheerless scene to ourselves; but its misty desolation was cheered and brightened to us by a ray from the City of Hope. I understood that day how necessary I was to Felix's happiness, and also how my love for him lay deep down amongst the springs of life.

But it is enough of the old happy days! He left us; Stephen went back to school, and my work-a-day life began.

XXXIII.

The west parlour was now a different and a busy scene. There were little figures perched primly on green-baize-covered benches, samplers

in hand, shaping uncouth letters on the canvas ; also stammerings through Mrs. Barbauld's stories and Dr. Watts' hymns, and dear, quiet Jean setting everybody a good example. My beginning was very unambitious, but people spoke to me kindly and encouragingly, and said I must hope better things by and by, being still little more than a child myself. In the course of a few weeks I fell into the routine of my new duties, as if I had been at them for years. I had met with a great many stumbling-stones on the path of knowledge myself, so I did my best to lift them out of my young scholars' way. It is painful to hear a child fret over its difficulties, therefore I did the hard bits in seams, and the obstinate sums that would not come right ; and if—as sometimes would occur to Polly Withers, and Janey Munro—the little people flew into a passion, and stamped or danced on their books or work, I let them achieve their riot and subside into shame-faced silence. Altogether the results were not discouraging. By four o'clock in the afternoon the scholars had all trotted home ; then

I either had an hour's private study in my old retreat, the stained window, or else took a walk into the country with Jean. Sometimes we went to the Minster; almost always we did on Wednesdays, when Dr. Munro, the head organist, played, and the anthems were the finest.

Stephen was rarely in, except at meals: his good resolutions had departed to that limbo which good resolutions are said to pave. He still frequented the bell tower, went boating on the river, and played at cricket, while I accomplished his impositions. I wished sometimes Mr. Withers could know who did them; then perhaps they might have been rather less frequent. The lad had a blithe, frank humour which made him very popular among his companions; he was mischievous but not malicious, and his selfishness was so gay and unconscious that it was impossible to hate it—almost to discourage it.

Post time at our house was nine o'clock. Felix Mayne's letters always came on Thursday mornings. For nearly a year there was no more conspicuous event in my life than the receipt of these letters.

They were always dearly welcome ; for though I was contented and happy as girl could be, they came like a breath of vivifying air through the tranquil summer noon, whispering of a golden autumn yet to come, rich laden with such pleasant tones. No shadow had fallen yet across the rippling river, and the wayfarer still breasted her way with head erect, and pulses throbbing, full of life and hope.

XXXIV.

On the eighth of October in this year, my brother Stephen went up to Oxford. He left by the night coach, and I went to the office to see him off. In his haste—for we were late—and the necessity of looking after his luggage, he quite forgot me, and never said good-bye. I stood on the inn steps till the guard wound his unmusical horn, and the four horses started—hoping that he would give me a wave of his hand at least ; but no—the coach disappeared, and he never turned

his head. "Ah, well!" thought I, "the dear lad is thinking of his new career, and may be forgiven."

It was a very dark night, and but for the rare lamps at the street corners, I might almost have lost my way; I did not loiter in my walk home, therefore, but with my cloak gathered tightly round my shoulders made the best haste I could. When I came into the Minster gardens the keen autumnal winds met me; the moon was just rising, and began to gleam through the drifting clouds, making black, broad shadows on the grass. I passed through the gates by the Deanery into the Close; few people were abroad, and they seemed to be hurrying homewards out of the chilly night. There was a depressing sensation at my heart just then: perhaps it came from Stephen's forgetfulness of me—I cannot tell; but it was the first time for many months that I had felt dull or saddened. I stood for a minute or two, to look upwards at the moon, which had broken from its screen of inky cloud; the age-worn elms and poplars were writhing in the wild

gusts that came sweeping round the Minster : in this moonlit mist it had a more ghostly air than usual, and the grey old houses in the Close, with their ornate gables, narrow windows, and deep porches, looked like haunted dwellings. From their gardens, where the sun shone rarely, came a smell of dank, rotting leaves, and grave-mould ; and the owl that lived in the huge sycamore in Chapter House Yard gave out a long melancholy hoot. It is weak to dwell on presentiments, but it was inherent in my dreamy temperament.

My mother was on the look out for me, thinking me long absent, and I met her with a smile.

“ Did he go in good spirits, Kathie ? ” she asked very cheerfully.

I replied that I thought he did, and we talked about him and his prospects till bed-time ; but there were reserved fears with both of us—especially with her. Stephen’s departure was naturally a source of anxiety ; we should have felt better satisfied if he had left us in a more staid frame of mind, and with a higher sense upon him

of his duties and responsibilities. But it seemed a moral impossibility to make any enduring impression on his elastic temper; there was a weak side to his character which made us tremble for him secretly, now that he was removed from the influences and restraints of home.

A whole month we waited for the letter that he had promised my mother should receive in a few days. She looked more wan and troubled after each morning's disappointment, and when it came at last her fingers trembled so much that she could scarcely break the seal; she was obliged to ask me to read it, not having her glasses, she said—but, ah! my poor mother! I knew it was for the tears in your eyes you could not see to read your careless darling's letter!

An emotion of rather unsisterly vexation hurried me through the half dozen lines that composed it. There were no details such as we expected: no description of the town, of his college, his masters, or his studies; but a contemptuous allusion to the Eversley boating-club, and a lengthy eulogium on the companions

with whom he was already popular. He excused the brevity of the letter, for which his mother had been waiting exactly five weeks and three days, by saying he was going to join a wine-party given by one of his friends. When I had read it through once, my mother took it, and pored over the scanty lines as if trying to extract a grain of comfort or affection from them ; but, at last, with a sigh she folded it up, and said she feared Stephen would always be thoughtless.

The time went on. His letters were never frequent, but I could have found in my heart to wish that they had been even less so, for they invariably cast a damp over us for the day. Never, by any chance, did he give us a cheerful account of his proceedings: he had to endure more privations and to fag harder than any man of his acquaintance; neither did he scruple to complain of the smallness of his allowance, and to beg for its increase. My mother was grieved for him, and retrenched our already scant luxuries to minister to his. Thereupon, I privately wrote him a remonstrance. I laid before him the

sacrifices our mother had made, and was still making, for him; and besought him not to make her affection the instrument of his selfish indulgence. In answer I received a letter calling me unkind and unsisterly, and bitterly disclaiming his wish to cultivate his own pleasures at our expense; yet three posts later brought an urgent petition for ten pounds, with a postscript begging it might be kept from my knowledge, as I was so hard upon him. Nearly the whole quarterly sum of my mother's annuity went to satisfy this demand; and poor Jean, like Isabel before, lost her music lessons. Unstable characters like Stephen are a vast trial to love and forbearance; but my mother still excused, rather than blamed him, and I was ever willing to think and hope for the best.

The Christmas vacation he spent in London with our aunt Aurelia; and though it would have been pleasanter to have had him with us, we were cheered by knowing that he had more gaiety there than he could have had in Eversley, and also that he was being weaned from the

companions in whom he had delighted when at home. Isabel, too, was glad to have him; and each wrote very kindly of the other. Mr. Mayne again spent a few days with us at this time; but as his visit was as quiet as the former one it calls for no particular details.

When Stephen returned to Oxford the demands on the purse at home ceased, and we began to flatter ourselves that he was, at last, beginning to study as he ought; but still we heard of no distinctions, no triumphs of his brilliant talents: his examinations were not passed successfully, but got through indifferently. Mr. Withers said he was disappointed in him; and through young Francis Maynard there came, from time to time, rumours of wildness and reprimand, but nothing serious enough to increase our anxiety very materially.

In the spring of this year my grandmother Brande died suddenly at Crofton, leaving the bulk of her property to my aunt Aurelia, and a legacy of a thousand pounds to be equally divided amongst her son's surviving children. A codicil

to her will, added during my visit, also bequeathed to me a further sum of five hundred pounds. To Miss Bootle was left a life annuity of ten pounds, in consideration of her long and faithful services. Stephen was excessively angry and disappointed at the smallness of his inheritance; he expected to share equally with Mrs. Marston, and had, I believe, incurred some heavy pecuniary responsibilities in that hope. The whole of his legacy melted away during his second year at college.

XXXV.

I was now fast approaching the end of my twentieth year. My little school had flourished, and my pupils had satisfied eager parents—one parent so much that he expressed a wish to establish me permanently in his home. This was Mr. Withers, of the Grammar-school. The worthy master had been a widower many years, but he did not think his five children, or his

ten lustres, constituted a serious objection to a marriage with me, and was deeply offended at my refusal.

On my twenty-first birthnight I sat up in my closet-room long after the others were in bed. I kept that Christmas Eve in a mood of still happiness, and I saw the dawn of the day of the everlasting Sacrifice with a glad heart. Hope had been near to me, and whispered a prophecy for the next year's spring which made my cheek glow in its solitude. I had waited patiently, and my reward drew near. No need to tell Felix now that sometime I should be his; no need to say to him any more, "Be strong and of good courage." He was as assured as I that we were rapidly approaching that fair city of our hope, whence we should journey together all the more peacefully and gladly for our long probation. No Christmas Eve, before or since, has been like that one spent alone: never since have Christmas-bells had the same tone of promise and prophecy as they had that Christmas morning.

And this was the last time that my mother ever saw all her children collected round her at once. Stephen had come down from Oxford and brought Isabel with him. Felix Mayne was also with us. It was, indeed, a very contented and a very happy time, and deserves to be remembered amongst my best of days. Jean and I had made the west parlour look its gayest; and that Yule-tide saw a gathering of young hopes about its hearth such as it was never to see again.

Francis Maynard was there; and keeping close by my mother all the evening was Lilius Fenton, my first pupil once, but now a slim, sprightly girl of sixteen, and my brother Stephen's promised bride. She was a very pretty, innocent creature, gentle tempered and affectionate, but so frail and delicate in constitution as to make all who were interested in her anxious to ward off from her the least sorrow. She was the only child of an eccentric antiquarian, Paul Fenton by name, who lived in one of the old houses in the Minster Close. He did not bear a very high

character in our neighbourhood, being a man of close niggardly habits, reputed rich. But his child he valued above his money—yes, even above his own soul; for he had bartered that for gold in many a foul and dishonest deed that never saw the light of the sun. She was the one human kindness left to his heart: the solitary link which bound him to earth and heaven.

He had never shrunk from the world's dirty work, but toiled through its sloughs and murky places with a zeal that showed his spirit was in the labour. What he did or what he endured—how many hearts he trampled on as if they had been stones—how many luckless creatures he had crushed as he crawled through the filthy avenues of dishonest gain to an eminence in society which men's wealth-worship made respectable, it matters not now to tell. He never spoke of his early career: he was well contented to let the veil which covered it rest unlifted. It might have exhibited dark scenes of human degradation, and sins foul as the bones in a sepulchre, could we have raised it; but his iniquitous days were past

and half forgotten, or only remembered in those dark hours when all the din and gratulation of success cannot blind the eye to their hideousness, or harden the ear to their rebuke.

Lilias had been left much to her own devices until her father consented to her coming to me ; and then, being of a most teachable and intelligent disposition, she learnt quickly. She attached herself warmly to my mother, and became Jean's favourite companion : her beauty was an attraction to Stephen, but he presently loved her for her good, sweet nature ; and I think we were all of us well contented when we heard that old Paul did not set himself against their attachment, and that they had exchanged rings, and were betrothed.

Isabel was very lively at our expense : she whispered to my mother that there was never so dull an assemblage of people collected together before ; for Stephen and Lilias were one pair, Mr. Mayne and Kathie another, and Francis Maynard and little Jean a third : for her part she considered lovers the very worst company in the world.

She would enliven us with some Christmas songs, she said; and flew to the piano with that intent.

What an exquisite, happy voice it was: clear, trilling, and natural as the tone of a bird! Even the lovers' talk ceased that we might listen to her; and I saw tears of wonder and pleasure glitter in my mother's eyes.

Little Ann came up with her faithful Joe on the stairs, and they were surprised by me seated in the painted window listening.

"Miss Kathie, it's like an angel's song," said Ann: "it is real beautiful."

Isabel was pleased at our praise, and was sweet as summer all the night: my mother and I thought she had outgrown her wilful temper, and become quite gentle and unselfish. She was a most lovely girl to behold: even Lilius Fenton looked like a pale weed beside her richly tinted face, and tall, proud form. She appeared older than she was, from a certain quick, impatient way she had, and an imperious little gesture of her head, which betrayed that she was conscious of her charms and valued them.

Francis Maynard would jest at her, and call her a fair shrew, and feign that he lived in dread of manual correction whenever he was in her presence. "Has Petruchio come yet?" he asked in a sly whisper.

"I shall never mate with a Petruchio!" cried she scornfully. "Katherine was not tamed: he was only hoodwinked. You do not tame a lioness by shutting her up in a cage. Petruchio made his shrew a hypocrite: he should not have tamed me so; I would have killed him rather," and her eye had a dangerous spark in it as she emphasized the avowal with a slight stamp of her foot.

She marched the length of the room with her neck up, and her nostril quivering, then came back amongst us with a shy, ashamed smile, and my mother drew her down to a seat beside her.

"I hope yours will be a gentle taming, Isabel," whispered she.

I remembered later how the child sat quiet after this, with her hands lying lightly folded on her lap and her face bent down, while we were

all talking merrily around her: she took no part in our conversation; and when Francis Maynard, after a while, asked her suddenly, "Are you seeing pictures in a magic glass, Isabel?" she jumped up with a start and a sigh that made us all laugh. She feigned to be displeased, and went back to her music; where I think she must have played her reverie, for it was a strange, wild thing—very melancholy sometimes, and sometimes madly gay.

"What is that?" Francis inquired, bent on teasing her.

She made no reply, but went on with a plaintive melody: the music seemed to trickle from her fingers like water in sunshine over a shallow bed. Presently every voice sank into silence, for a solemn hymn broke on us suddenly, then the trill of bells, and both died into a low wailing strain which made me shiver.

"Oh, Isabel! don't play in that way: it is like a requiem!" cried Stephen. "Who taught you those doleful ditties? Give us something inspiring."

And forthwith she struck into a march; but by and by that too sank into a subdued movement; and when the sound swelled again, Felix exclaimed, "That is the 'Dead March in Saul,' Isabel."

"Yes; I cannot help it: nothing comes to me to-night but dirges," replied Isabel; and she played it to the end.

My mother smiled, and began a new theme, and the piano was shut up. After that came supper, which broke the charm of quiet imposed on us by the music, and the rest of the evening was all cheerfulness and gaiety.

Stephen and Francis Maynard would have snap-dragon; and, burning their fingers in the pursuit of raisins, were laughed at for their pains most merrily by Isabel and Lillas, in whose service they suffered. Then they burnt nuts in the fire in pairs to see who loved them; and Francis showed Isabel himself and her blazing peacefully together, while Lillas's representative flew away from Stephen's into the remotest corner of the room. My mother told them this was not

the night for burning nuts, and so they were not likely to give a true prophecy.

Then there were Christmas healths and kind wishes, and more talk round the yule logs, and then parting—Stephen taking Liliás home, and Francis Maynard reluctantly departing to his lodgings at his uncle Withers'; who himself was keeping Christmas, with all his young family, at his father's house in Norfolk.

Stephen presently returned shivering, saying it was a bitter cold night, and I left them to go round the house, as my custom was, to see that all was safe, and the door into the Court barred and locked. On coming to the red door, however, I found that Ann's Joe had not yet departed; and, from what I heard, he must have been supplicating for a kiss—"Come, give me one, Ann: don't be cross; only one," said he in an uncouthly tender way.

"I shan't, then," was Ann's curt reply.

Poor Joe entreated yet awhile longer, till Ann, exasperated at his stupidity, exclaimed, "Can't you help yourself, Joe?" a permission of which

he liberally availed himself, and then departed happy.

Ann came in, looking rosy and triumphant. "Joe's just gone, Miss Kathie," said she cheerfully: "this has been a real good day, I call it."

XXXVI.

Three days after Christmas Mr. Mayne returned to Crofton. Isabel was to remain with us a few months, and Stephen's vacation was not expired. My brother's presence did not add to the comfort or peace of our home. Age and mixing in gay society had not improved him: he had assumed an air of superiority over us, which would have been merely ridiculous had not it been accompanied by a surliness and moroseness of temper quite insufferable. Abroad and in society he could be as genial and gay as ever, and though exacting with Lillas, he was gentle to her; but to his own family he was generally moody and indifferent. After Mr. Mayne was gone, he

rarely passed an evening at home, and habitually stayed out late.

I remember one night especially; Isabel, Jean, and Ann, were all gone to bed, and as my mother was not well, I wished her to go too, but she would not. The fire was mended up, and she sat by it a long while wrapped in a shawl, and talking a little at intervals: I then first began to notice how she was ageing, and how deeply care was telling on her face and strength.

Twelve o'clock struck; one o'clock struck; but still Stephen did not come. She rose, and began to pace the room to and fro. It was a bitter night, and the snow had fallen so thickly as to deaden every tread; and even yet the wind came laden with white flakes on every gust. I joined my mother in her walk. Everybody knows these waiting agonies: how at the creaking of a loose board you start and cry, "He is coming!" how you pause to hearken to each passing foot-fall; how loud the clock sounds through the hushed night; and often, often, the throb of your own heart too. My mother's face was ashen white, but she

refused to let me wait alone; and when she was weary she lay down on the couch and watched the fire. I occupied myself by pulling down the Yule garlands, now crisp and dry with the heat of the room.

“Hush, Kathie, darling! I cannot hear for those rustling leaves,” my mother said, so I took one of Felix’s books, and sitting on the hearthrug, read a long time to myself.

The clock was on the stroke of two, when there came a stealthy knock at the outer door. I descended hastily, and let my brother in. He stopped a minute or two in the hall to shake the snow from his clothes, and then followed me up to the parlour. His face was flushed, and he was in a moody, irritable temper.

“You are late to-night, my boy!” said my mother, gently; “where have you been?”

“Never mind!” was the surly reply.

For a few seconds my mother stood gazing at him: her eyes were dry, and she said not a word of reproach or complaint; but most touching was her voiceless agony. What a harvest

was this for her who had sown with so much care !

“ Good night, Stephen ; you will go to bed soon : these late hours will destroy your health,” she said at last, bending forward to kiss him ; he repulsed her impatiently, and turned away his face.

The tears were coursing down her pale worn cheek as we went up-stairs together ; but she was anxious to excuse him even yet.

“ Do not think of it, Kathie : you see he is not quite himself to-night,” she said.

But for her the frequency of slight could never dull the pain : her dream of maternal pride, shorn of its beauty, looked ghastly now in its pall of faded love. It was a heavy sorrow for all those hearts who put their faith in Stephen Brande : their deepest devotion would be but a thankless sacrifice for one so careless and so selfish.

XXXVII.

“Oh, Kathie! what a frightful pile of work, when will it all be done?” cried Isabel, as Ann came into the parlour with a pile of linen which she had been submitting to a softening process down in the kitchen.

“We’ll all be fain to see the day, Miss Kathie,” observed Ann smiling broadly; “solidly speaking, Mr. Mayne is the best and kindest gentleman, except old master, that ever I came acquainted with.”

My sisters stood looking at the white heap reflecting; then Jean turned to me with a pretty, puzzled air and said: “We might think, Kathie, that you had never had any clothes before, or else that you suspect you will never be allowed a fresh supply. Do all girls have such a quantity of new things when they marry?”

“Most have: it is the custom.”

“Then, as soon as yours are finished, I think

I'll begin mine. I am fourteen now, and may expect my time to come by four-and-twenty. In ten years with great diligence I might accomplish them. Don't you think so, Kathie?"

"Possibly," I replied, mimicking her demure air; "possibly you might, but not without the most serious application: you would have to relinquish everything else, of course."

"I shall speak to my mother about it: it is not pleasant to be all in a fuss at the end. I wonder if it is with a view to being married some day that Ann knits all those worsted stockings. She never does any other work; she must have scores of pairs: I should like to inquire."

"Do, Jean, if your curiosity is very lively."

Ann again appeared, breathless, and cast down more linen.

"That's the last of it, thank goodness!" she ejaculated, giving her cap a vicious pull to one side: "you'll want a waggon and horses to fetch you and your traps away, Miss Kathie."

"One small pony brought them up-stairs," I returned, smiling at the grimaces Ann made

while giving her arms a little comfortable friction.

"It is time you thought about marrying, Ann; perhaps you do think of it?" said Isabel.

"Of course, I do, Miss Isabel; I'm getting my stockings ready."

"Ah, Ann! you heard what I said," cried Jean.

"Yes; I heard every word."

"Well then, Ann, tell us how many pairs you have?"

"I don't rightly know myself, Miss Jean, but I could count 'em if you're so curious; there's not much over thirty pair."

"Thirty pair of worsted stockings! You can never wear them out, Ann."

"They'll come in, Miss Jean, never fear. Keep a thing seven years, and turn it; keep it another seven years, and turn it again, and you'll find a use for it at last. My stockings won't go a-begging. I've knitted 'em of all sizes. You see, Miss Kathie, I do think a bit now and then, though Missis says I'd lose my head if it was not fast on my shoulders."

"Your pans are in most danger now, Ann," said my mother, who entered at the moment; and Ann decamped, indulging in objurations on the carelessness of men in general, and of Joe Tinman in particular, who had promised *faithful* to call for those pans in the morning, and had forgotten.

Making bride's clothes! Many a long hour did I and my sisters spend over that pleasant work during those winter months, plotting and planning, dreaming and hoping. My bird, which had grown quite tame now, would come out of his cage and warble us a song while perched on my shoulder; and Jean and Isabel would be chorus. Miss Bootle, who since my grandmother's death had been so fortunate as to be elected to a place in the Old Maids' Hospital in Westgate, sometimes joined us, and brought gossip without stint: one evening in the dusk she arrived with Charlie under her cloak; but as he became demonstrative at the sight of my bird, he was sent down to the kitchen, where he sullied his white coat (newly washed for the visit) during his investigation of certain

mouse-holes behind the ledge where Ann put the kettles and pans. I found afterwards that the old lady carried him as a delicate attention to see her special friends, and that she was hurt at my not letting him stare my bird into fits. She, on another occasion, brought me a piece of exquisite old point lace, which she pressed on my acceptance with many significant smiles and nods and half words, which Isabel imitated with ludicrous exactness and gravity; and another time, to my dismay, she told the story of Mr. Longstaff's courtship, and wound up by saying, "From an ardent lover, Kathie converted him into a friend and a brother."

We were very merry over our work, especially when the companion was with us. She delighted to help us, and to see each finished garment folded away in a drawer, where all were to lie until a certain day in April. I used to stand looking at them myself sometimes, for a few quiet minutes, and thinking what a happy wife I should be, and how dearly I should love and reverence Felix. My habit of day-dreaming

was still as strong as ever, notwithstanding that the fulfilment of my hopes drew nigh.

And thus the time went on; Stephen being gone back to college, and we three girls with my mother at home, till the wild March winds began to blow.

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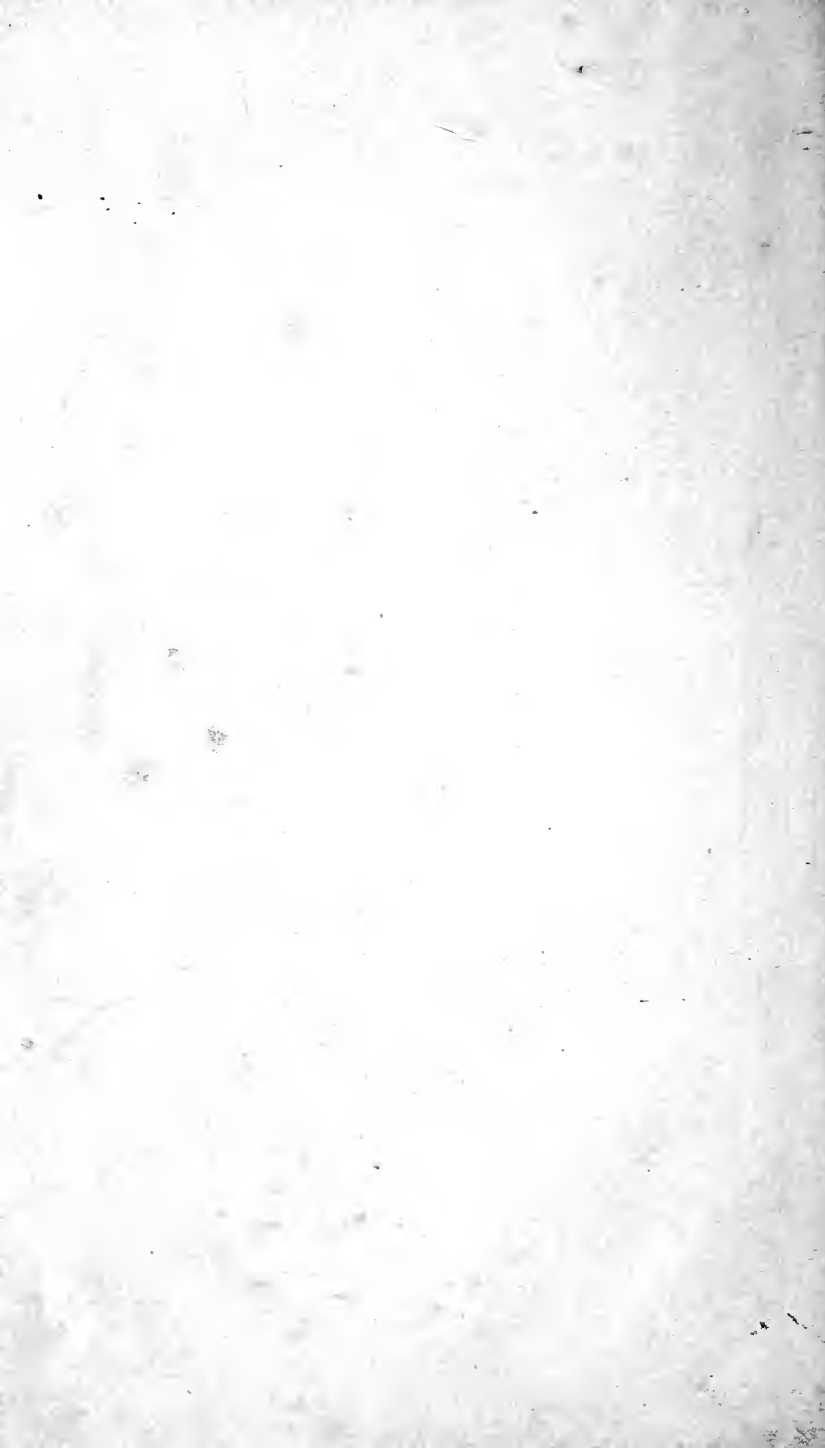
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